3-D SOVIET STYLE

Lessons Learned from the Soviet Experience in Afghanistan

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Recherche et développement pour la défense Canada
Canada

State of Research

- Russian assessment inadequate
- DRA officials memoirs in Dari
- Most studies usually portray Soviet experience in negative terms or dismissed it outright as irrelevant
- Focus usually on the military campaign
- Discussion of Soviet COIN as comprehensive effort (military, economic development and state building experience) virtually non-existent

Presentation Overview

- Relevance of Soviet Experience
- Defence – military ops
- Development – social, political, economic
- Diplomacy – internal efforts
- Conclusion – Lessons (to be) learned

Chronology of Soviet Engagement

- 1979 Soviets invade & bear brunt of fighting
- 1985 Increased Afghan Army role
- 1986 Soviets limit combat operations
- 1989 Soviet withdrawal

The Costs

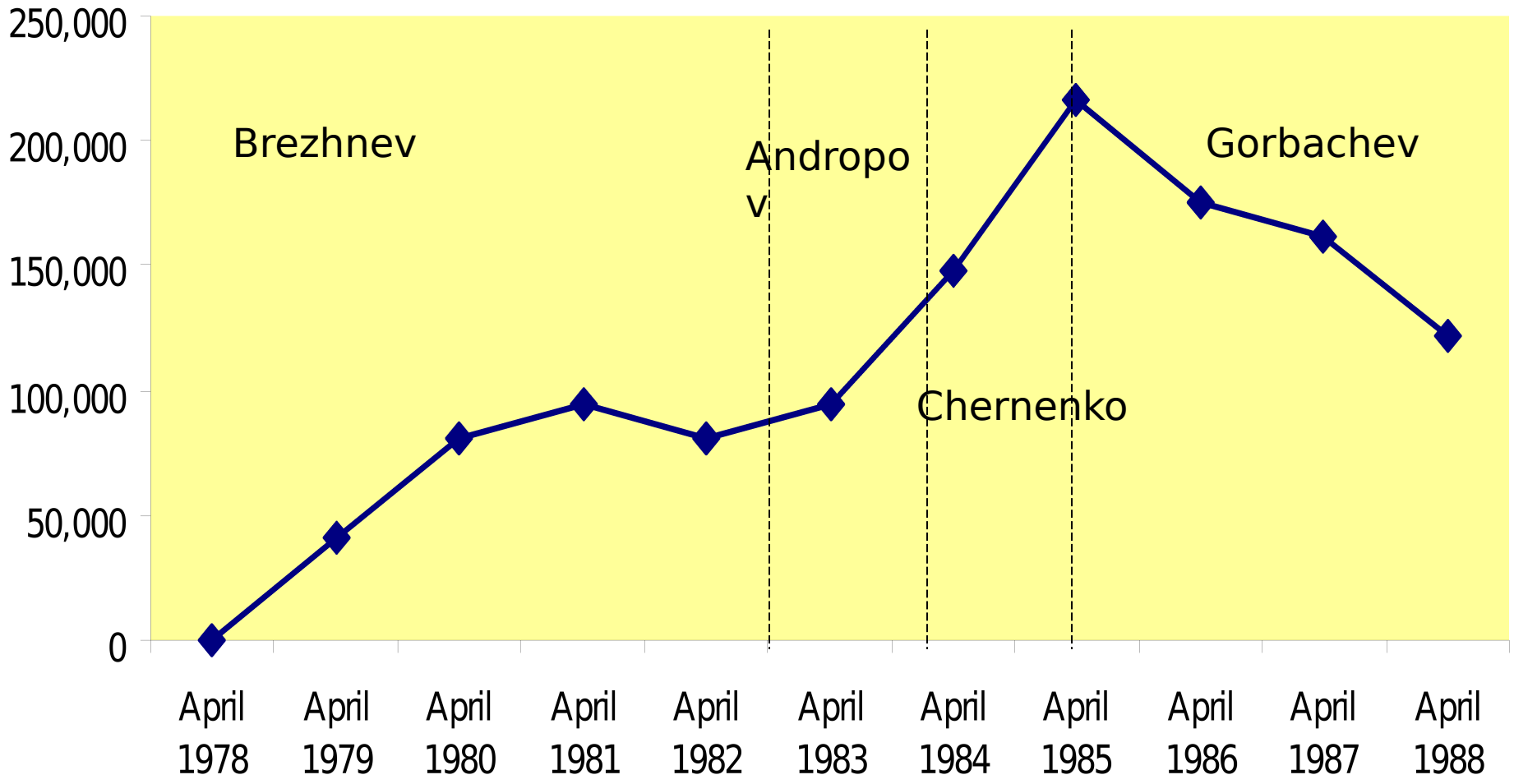
Soviet Union

- Killed…….. 15,000
- Wounded….. 54,000
- Illnesses…. 416,000
- Political failure

Afghanistan

- Killed …1-1.3 million
- Refugees…..5 million
- Civil war, failed state

Afghans Killed per Year



Is Soviet experience relevant?

- Afghan geography
- Ethnic & social divisions are persistent
- Basis for state legitimacy still very elusive
- The border with Pakistan

Is Soviet experience relevant?

- Military presence needed to provide security to the new regime
- Challenge of balancing military ops with civil affairs
- Underrated insurgency – culture of resistance & the ideology of Jihad
- “Limited Contingent”

Military Ops - General observations

- Initial strategy
- Different kind of war
  - Elusive and decentralized enemy
  - Terrain not conducive to mechanized operations
  - Most operations - small scale
- Forces not enough to control all territory
- Overriding principle - minimal casualties

Air Lift
Samarkand
CHARDZHOU
TURKMENISTAN
UZBEKISTAN
TADZHIKISTAN
DUSHANBE
Termez
Mazar-i-Sharif
Faizabad
Kunduz
Talikan
Badakhstan
Samangan
Baghlan
Pol-i-Khumri
Salang p.
Panjsir
Kunar
Asadabad
KABUL
Surobi
Jellalabad
Herat
AFGHANISTAN
Logar
Gardez
Khost
Shindand
Bagram
Irgun
Farakh
Lashkargak
Kandagar
INDIA
PAKISTAN

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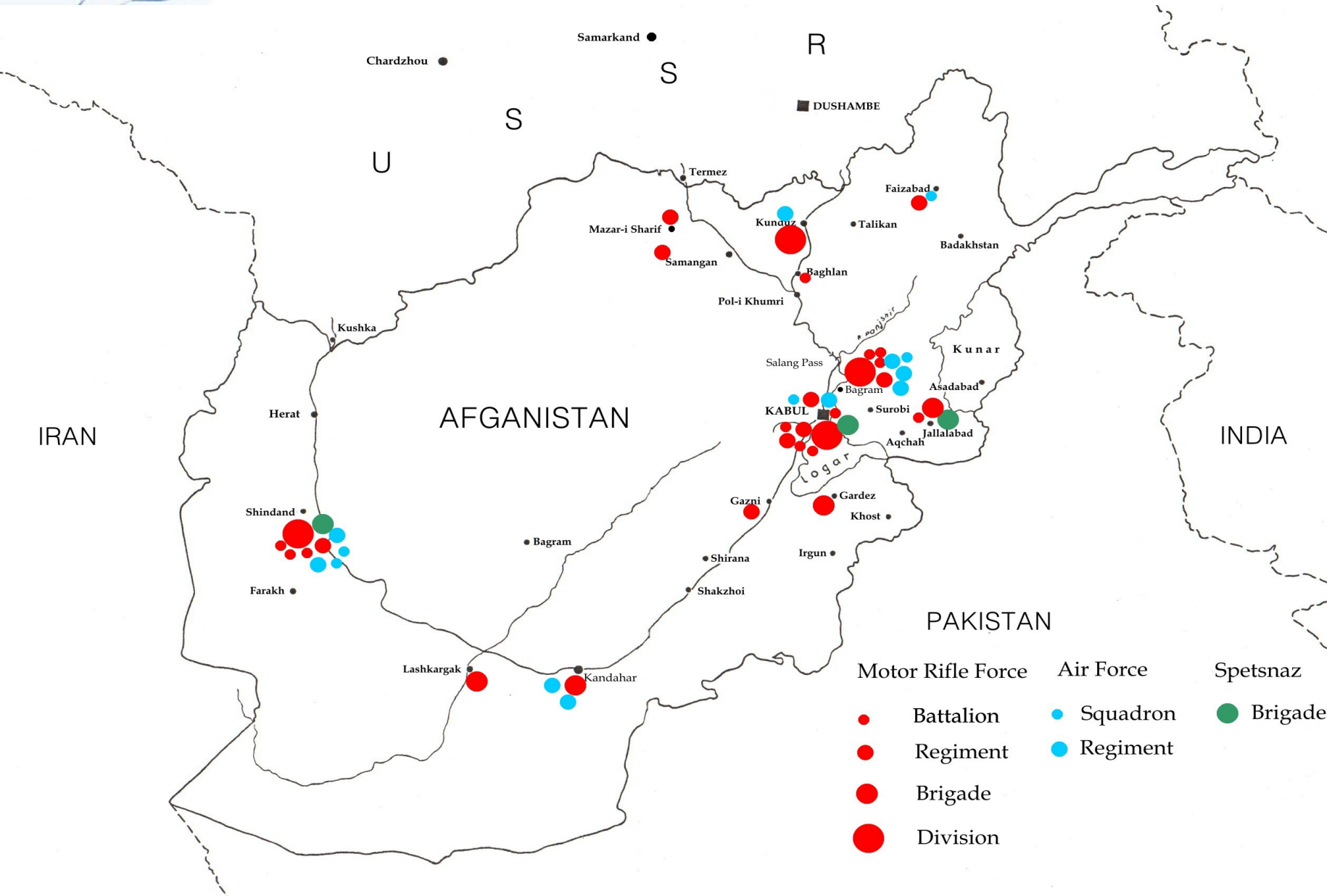
Soviet Bases



Defence - General observations

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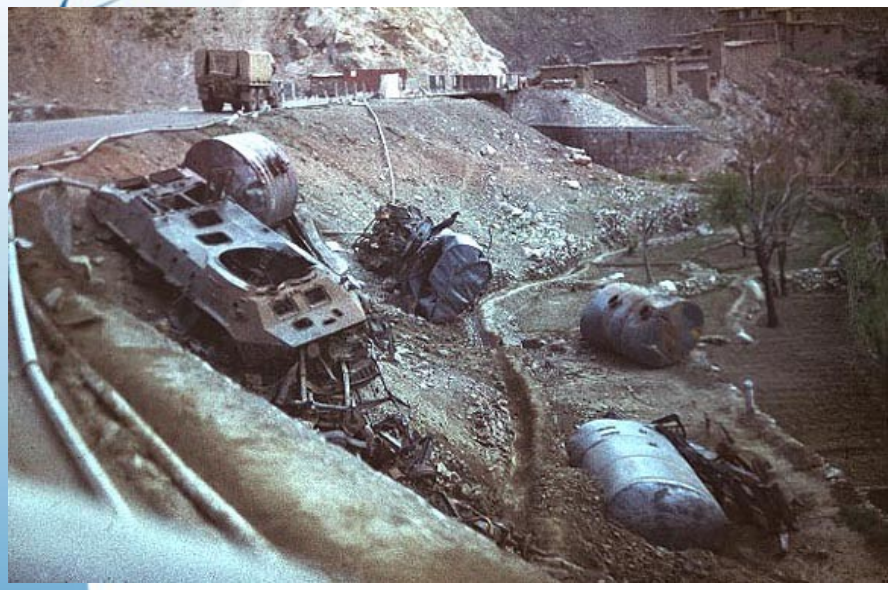
“The War of the Roads”

- Mujahidin’s standard tactics: the road ambush & road mines/ IEDs
- Blocking roads - a strategic goal: Mobility / re-supply & Afghan economy critically affected
- Soviets devote large forces to route protection
- Mujahidin mine/IED ops sophisticated: plastic mines
- Losses due to mines: 11,289 trucks, 1,314 APCs, 147 tanks, 433 artillery pieces, 1,138 command vehicles

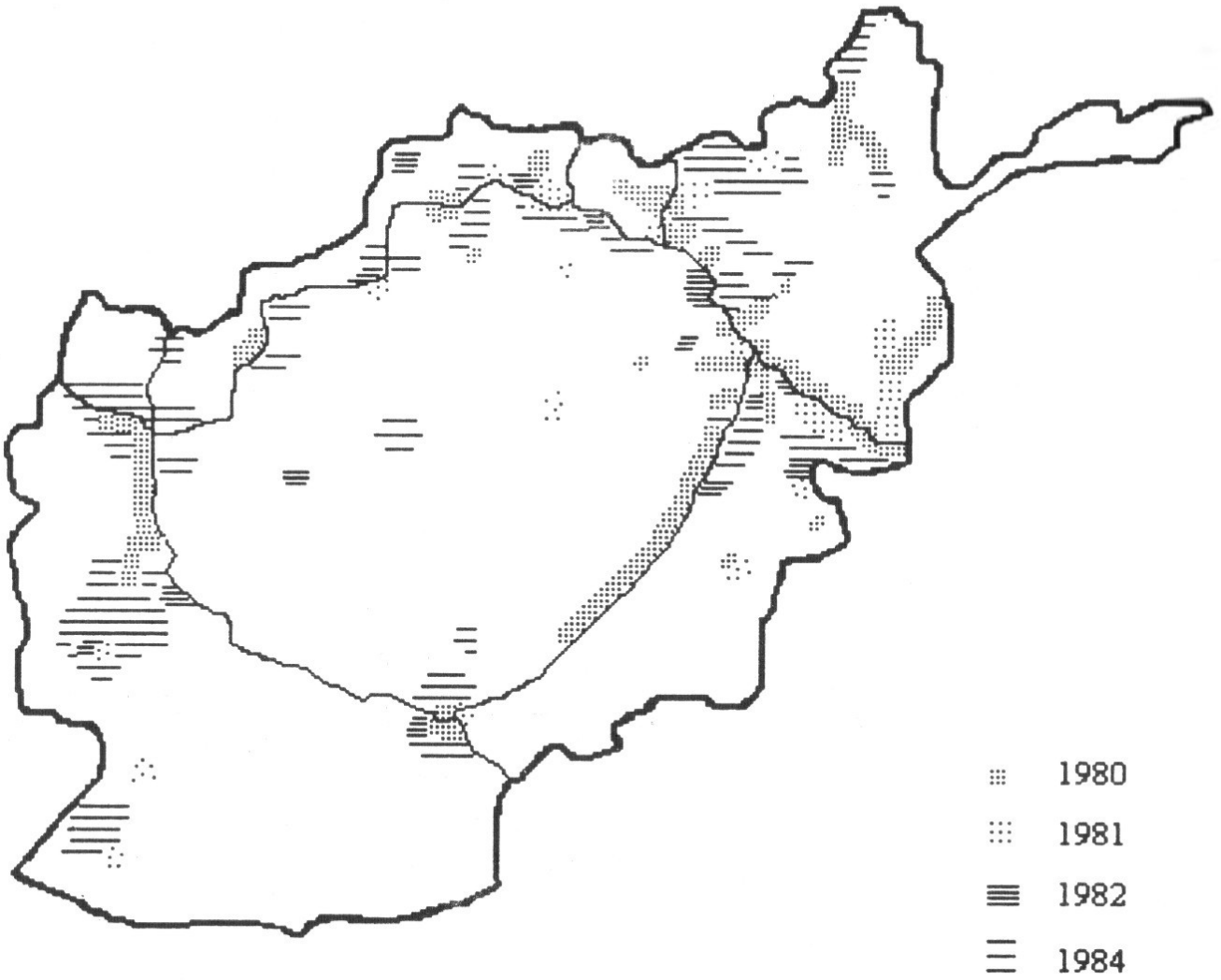
Mines & Ambushes



Adjustments - Strategic

- Focus on controlling the LOC
- Isolating and denying infrastructure support to the insurgency
- Deal making
- Security outposts
- Building up the strength of DRA Forces
- Withdrawal from active combat after 1986

Military activities 1980-84



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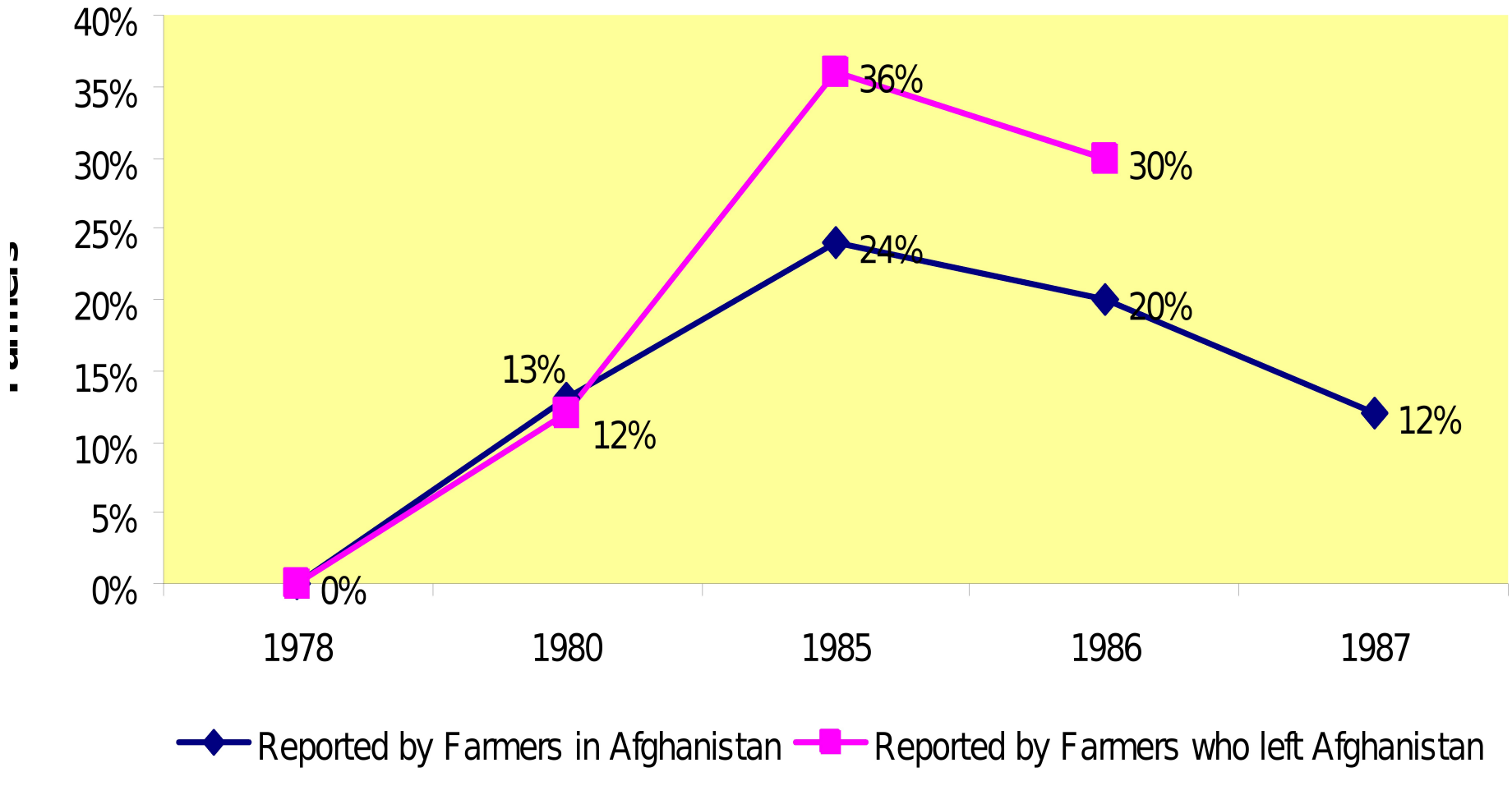
Soviet Counter-Insurgency Approach

"I hold it a principle in Asia that the duration of peace is in direct proportion to the slaughter you inflict on your enemy."

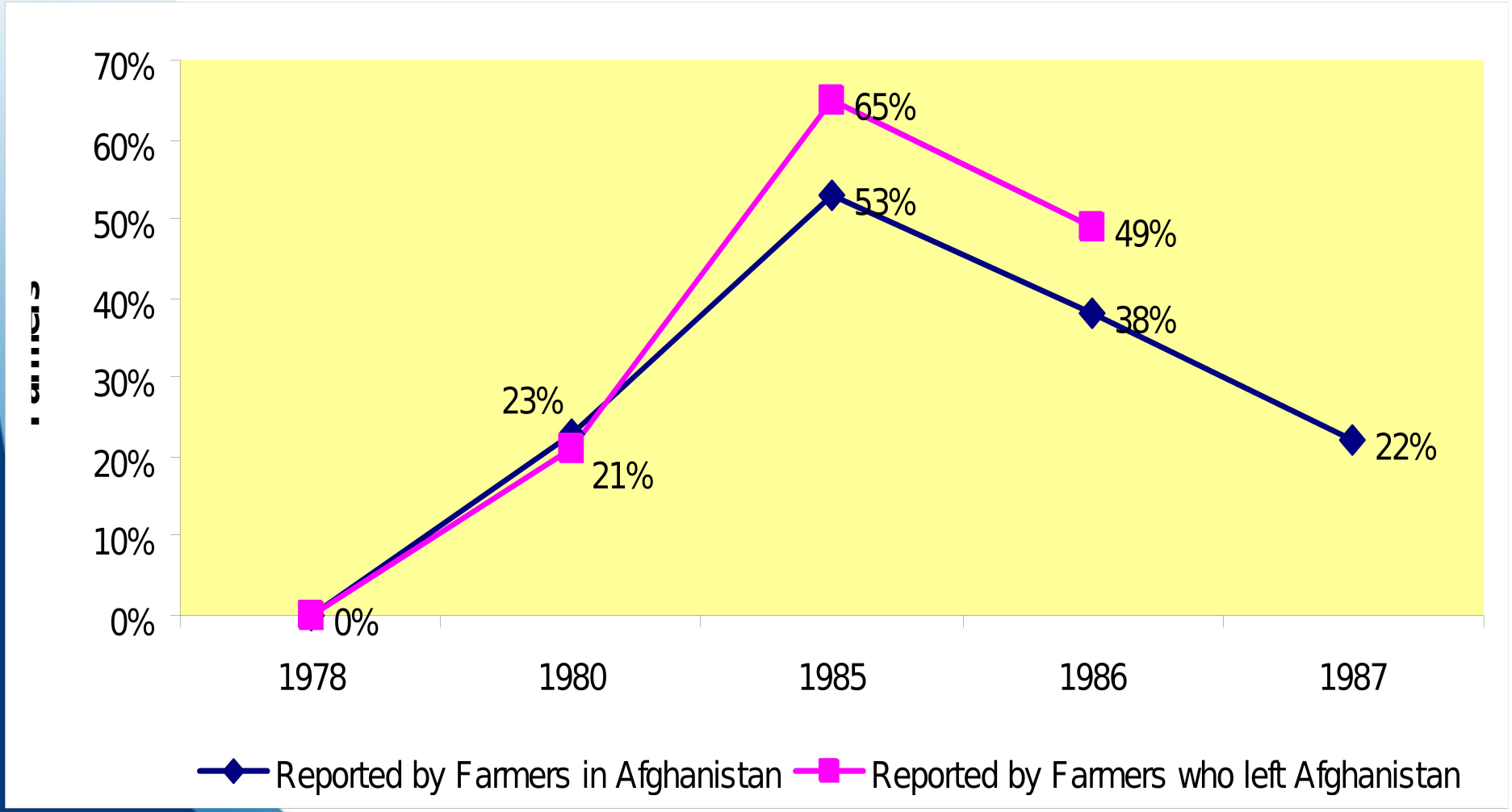
General M.O. Skobelev,

Conqueror of Turkestan, 1881

Effects of War - Destruction of Irrigation



Effects of War - Bombing of Villages



Unclassified

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Fayzabad, Village Sari, The regiment's command in negotiations with the local elders

Soviet solders and “friendly” mujahidin. Ceasefire

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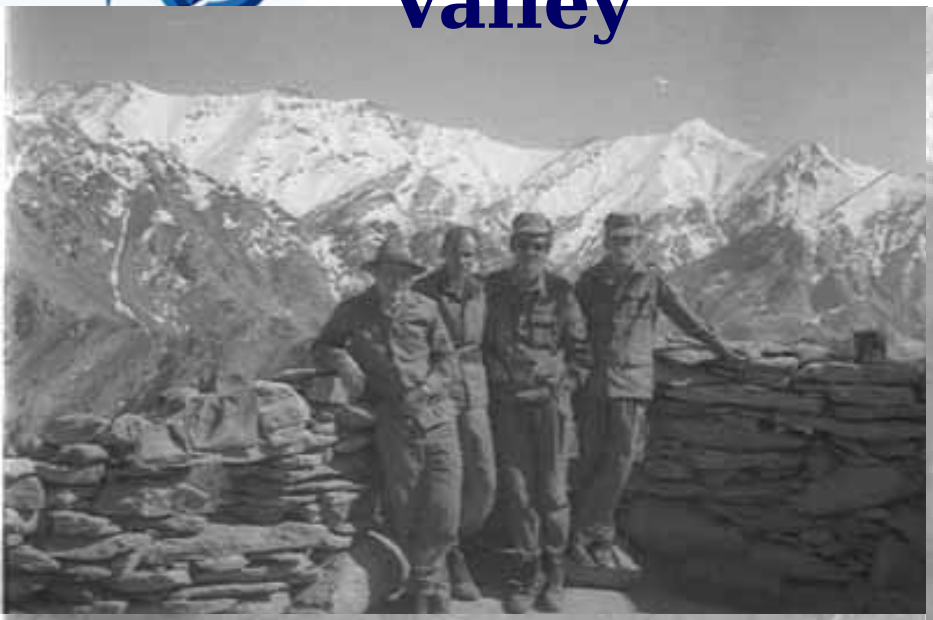
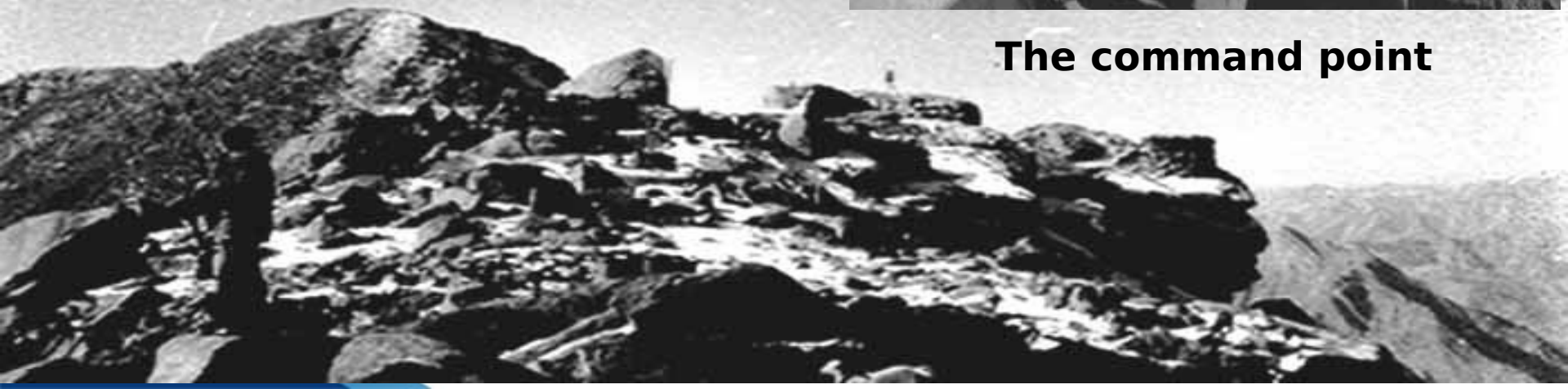
Outpost 21, Rukha, Panjshir Valley

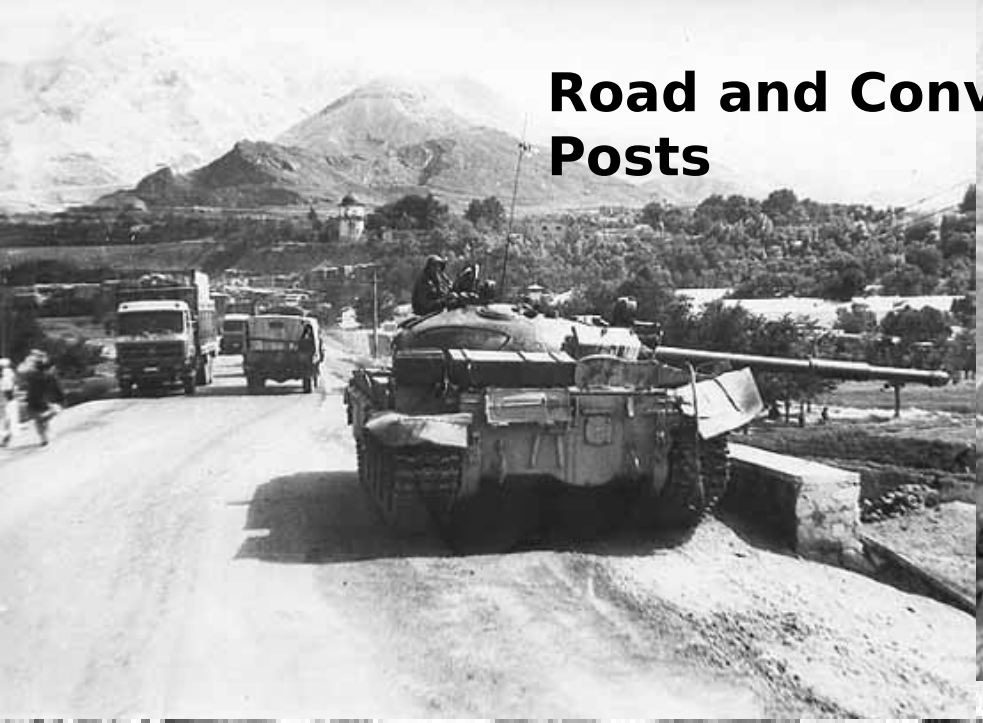


Post 21’s helicopter landing and radio-signal interceptor

The command point



Road and Convoy Security Posts



Adjustments - Strategic

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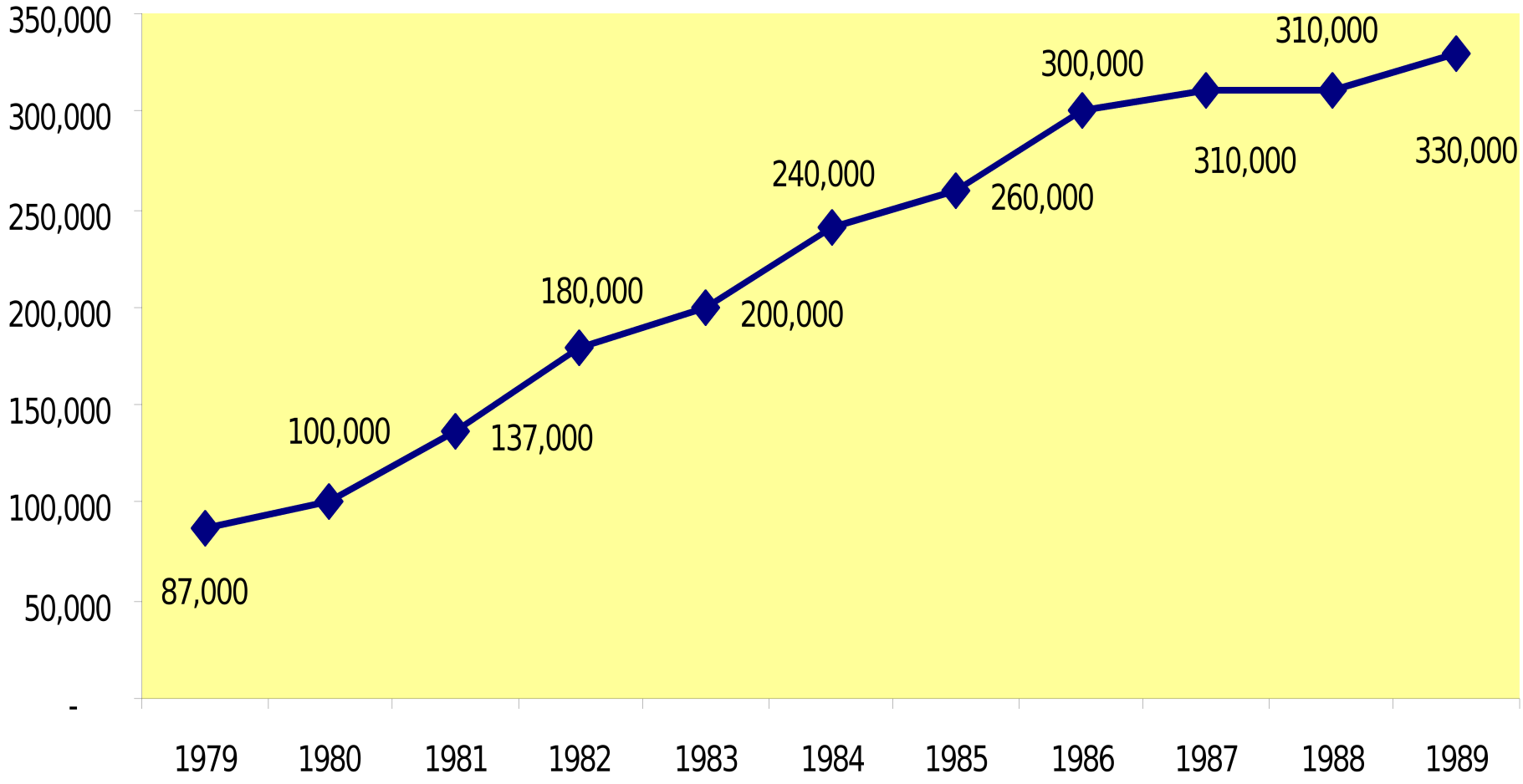
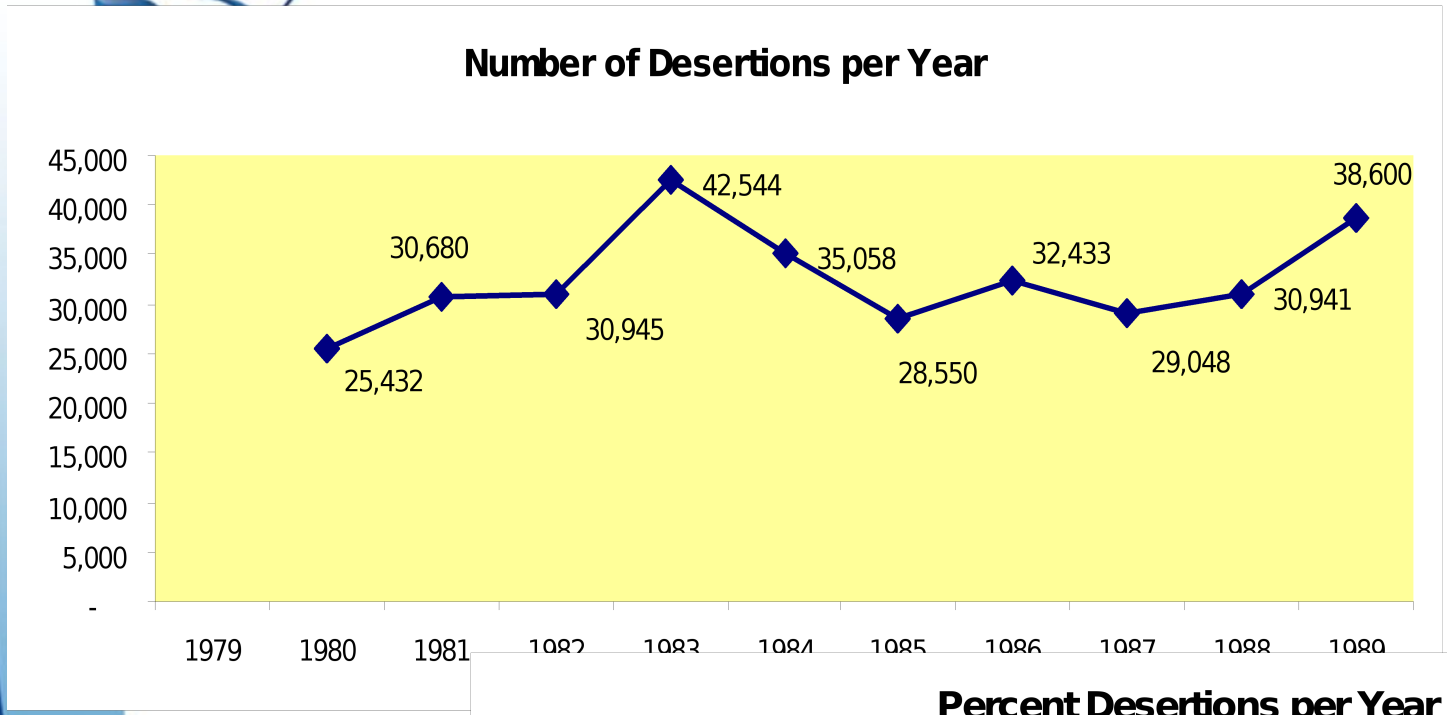
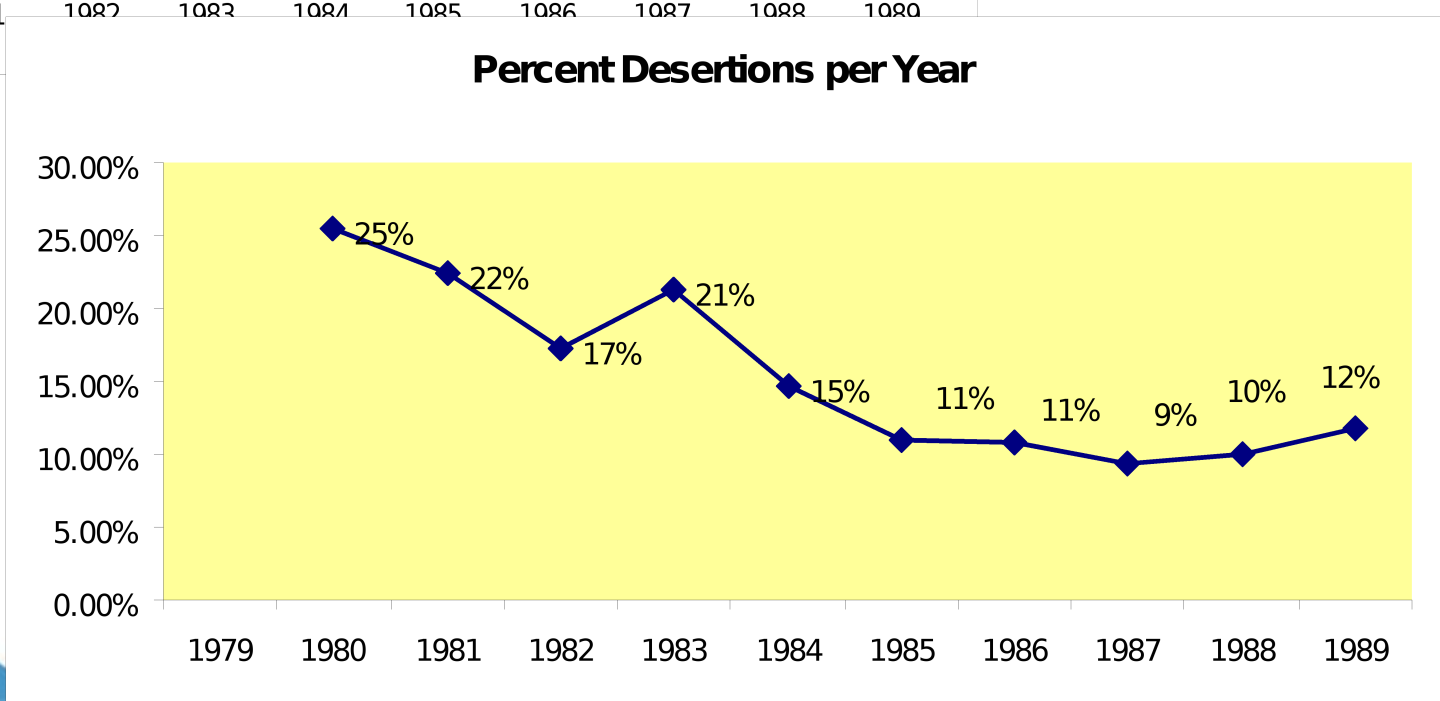
Growth of DRA Forces



Desertion Rates





DRA Forces breakdown (1988)

- Government Forces
  - Army 90,000
  - Border Guards 42,000
  - Gendarmerie 96,700
  - KhaD 68,700
  - Special Guards 11,500
- Total 308,900

- Militia on the side of government
  - Tribal 62,000
  - GDR 35,000
  - Self-defence 53,000

- Total 150,000

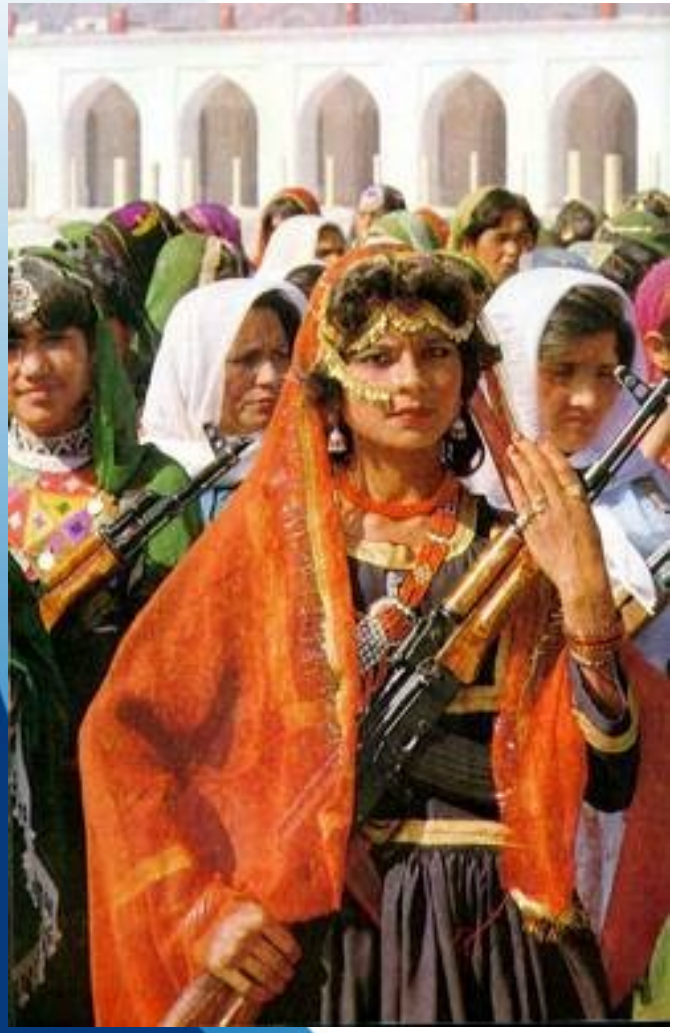
Grand Total
458,900

Force Level to Population Ratio Comparison

- Afghanistan (1988)
  - **26:1,000** (Soviet + DRA forces)
- Iraq (May 2008)
  - **22:1,000** (26:1,000 including Sons of Iraq).
- Afghanistan (2009)
  - **7.6:1,000**
- Required as per past COIN experience
  - **425,000 – 640,000**

DRA Air Force

Women in DRA Forces



DRA Air Force woman officer at Lycee graduation
ceremony in Baghram, Autumn, 1987.

Female village self-defence group

Soviet soldiers with the local self-defence unit, Badahshan

Adjustments - Strategic

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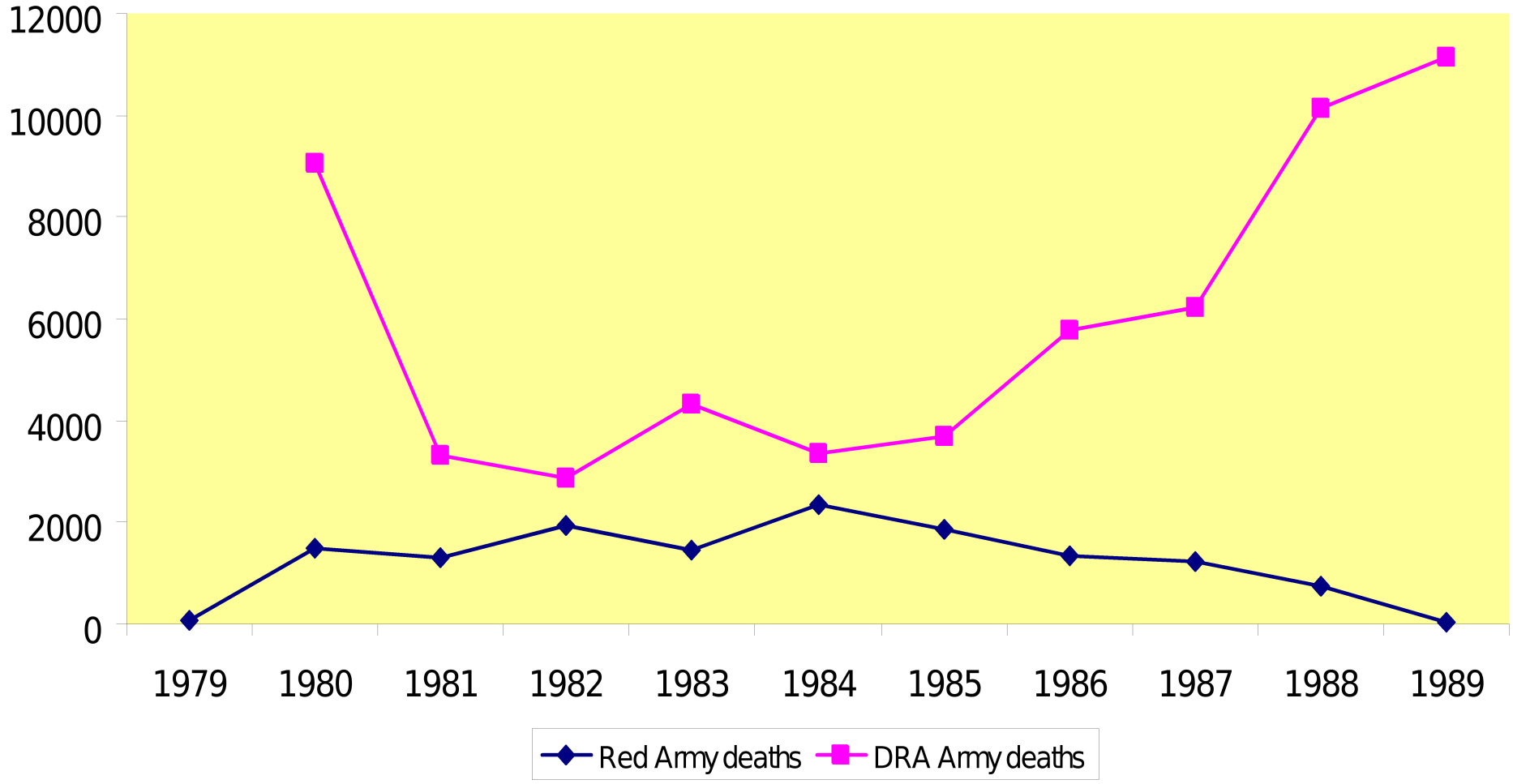
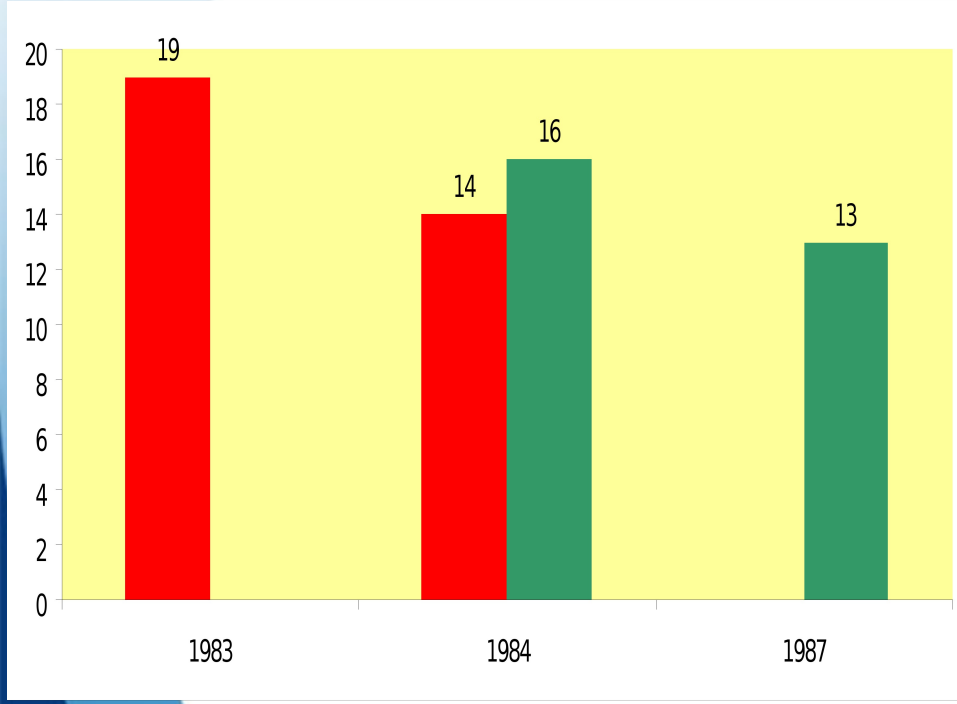
Soviet and DRA Forces Deaths



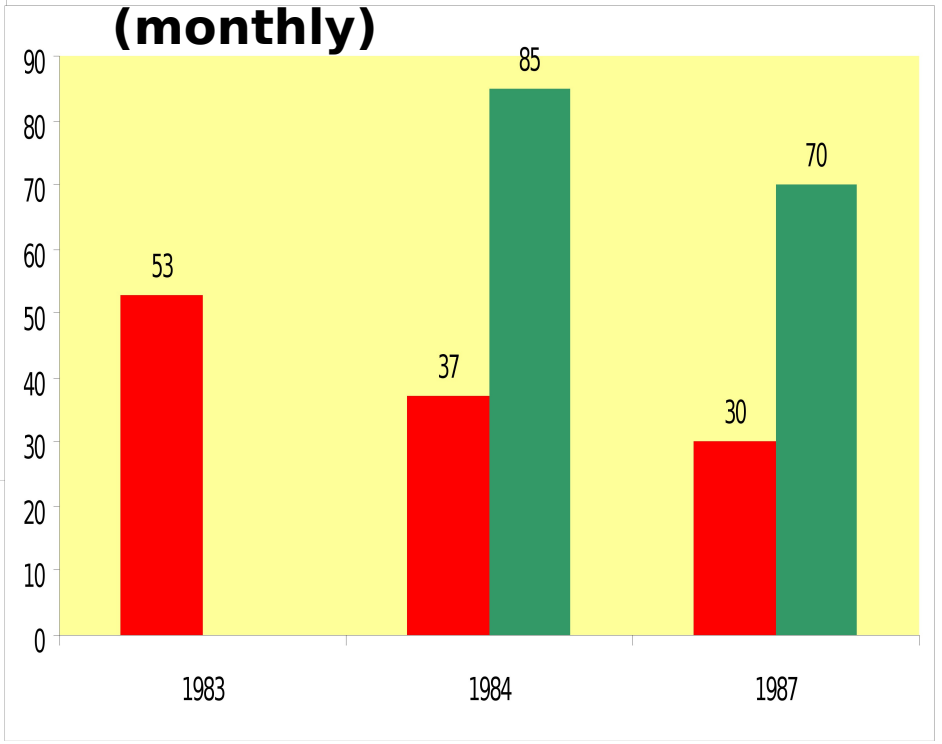
Border Sealing Activities

Ambushes (daily)



By Soviet
By DRA

Caravan Interceptions (monthly)

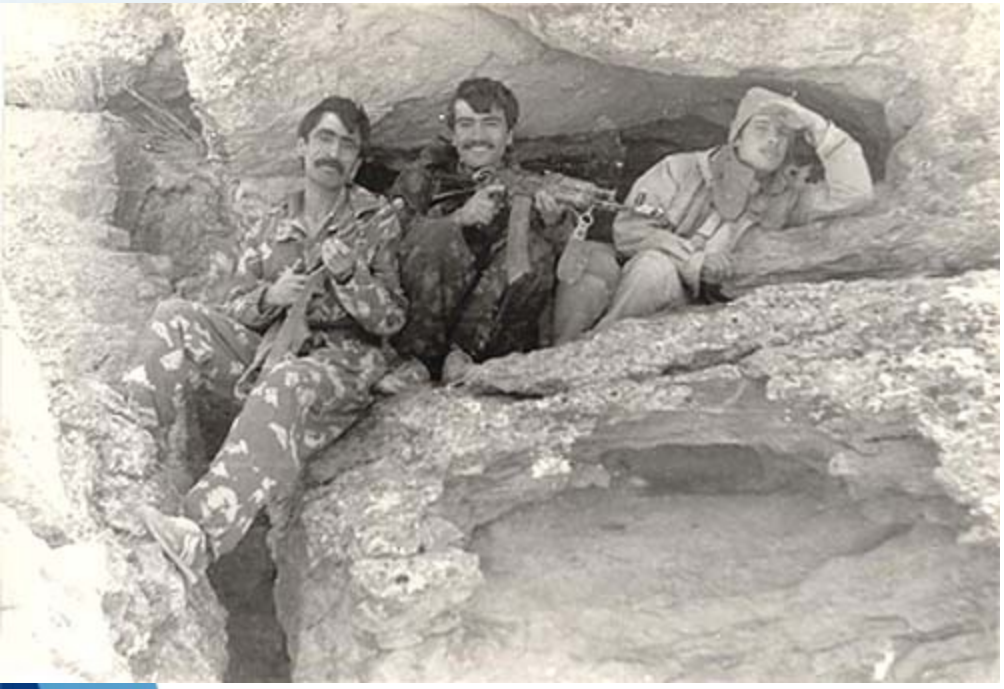


Soviet – Afghan joint operation

Handing Battalion's Position to the Afghan Army

Joint operation with KhaD captures a mujahidin leader

KhaD officers with captured mujahidins



Afghan and Soviet troops in ambush position

After successful operation, Parwan, April 1987

Adjustments - Tactical

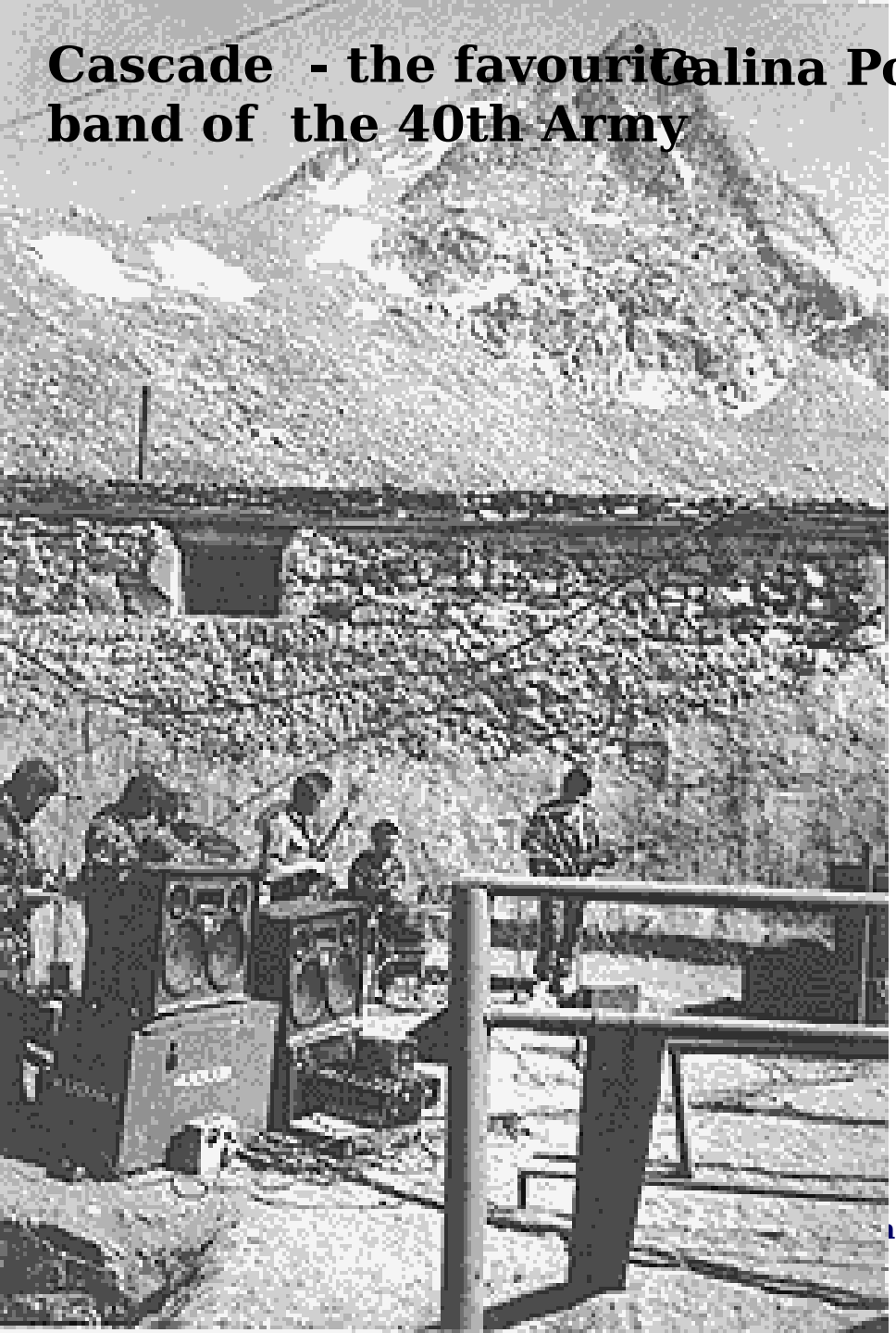
- Tactics devised to minimize losses
- Armed group concept
- Bounding overwatch
- Improvement of air assault and helicopter gunship tactics
- Enveloping detachments
- Use of special forces

66 Reconnaissance company.
Jalalabad

Spteznaz in action: Destroying a supply caravan, 1987

Cascade - the favourite band of the 40th Army

Galina Podzarev, an actor from Moscow



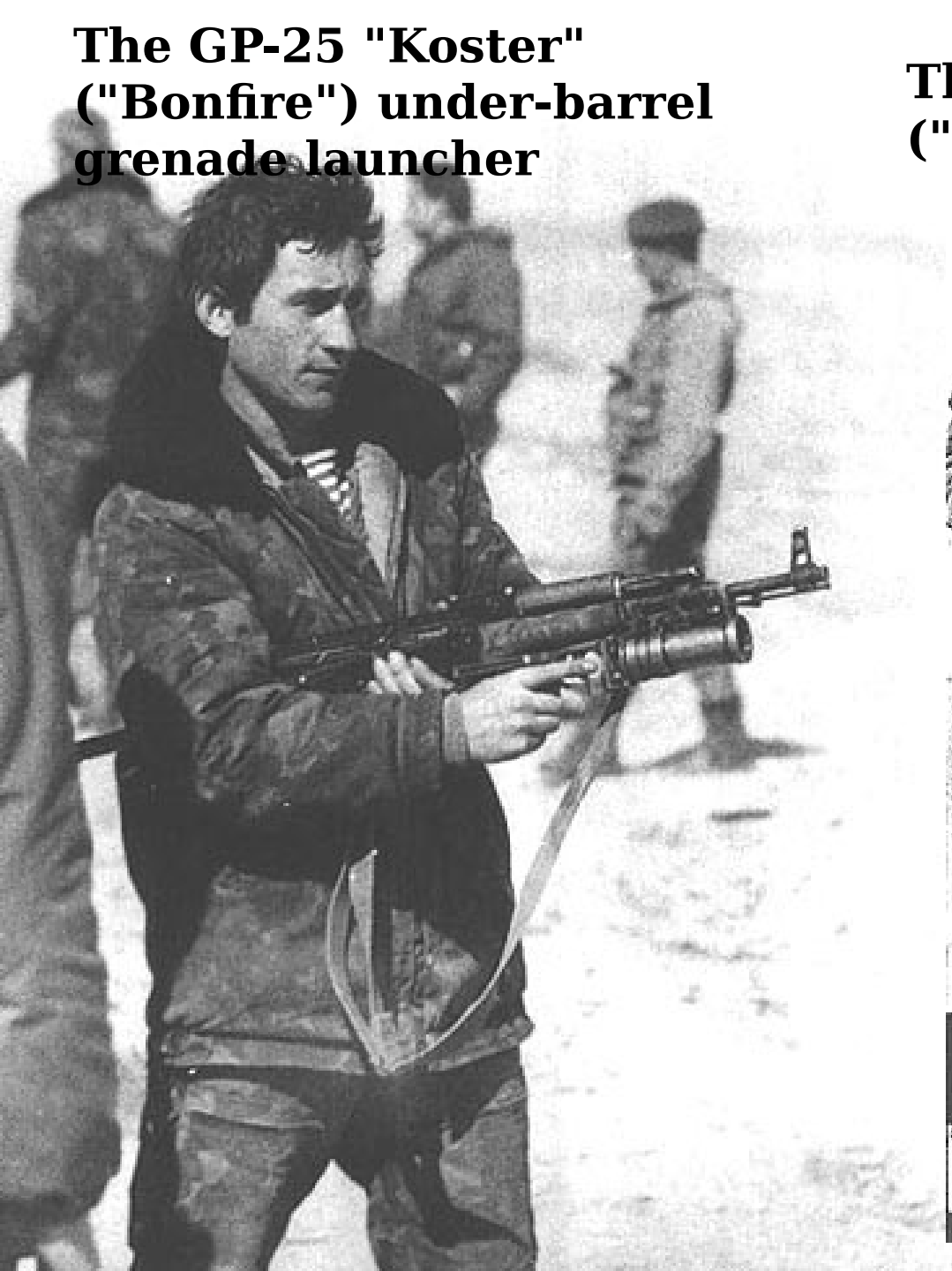
Adjustment - Force Structure

- Shift to smaller, independent units
  - 7 divisions ⇒ 4 divisions + independent units
- Withdrawal of tank and anti-aircraft regiments
- Decentralization of fire support and assets
  - shifted from army and division level to battalion level
- Air power, air mobility used as a force multiplier
  - helicopters increased from 50 to 300
- Use of special forces
  - 20% of all Red Army special forces

Adjustment - Equipment and Training

- New systems tested and introduced
  - personnel carriers, helicopters and helicopter gunships, but not tanks
- Improvements to infantry's personal gear and firepower
- Specialized mountain warfare training schools

The GP-25 "Koster" ("Bonfire") under-barrel grenade launcher



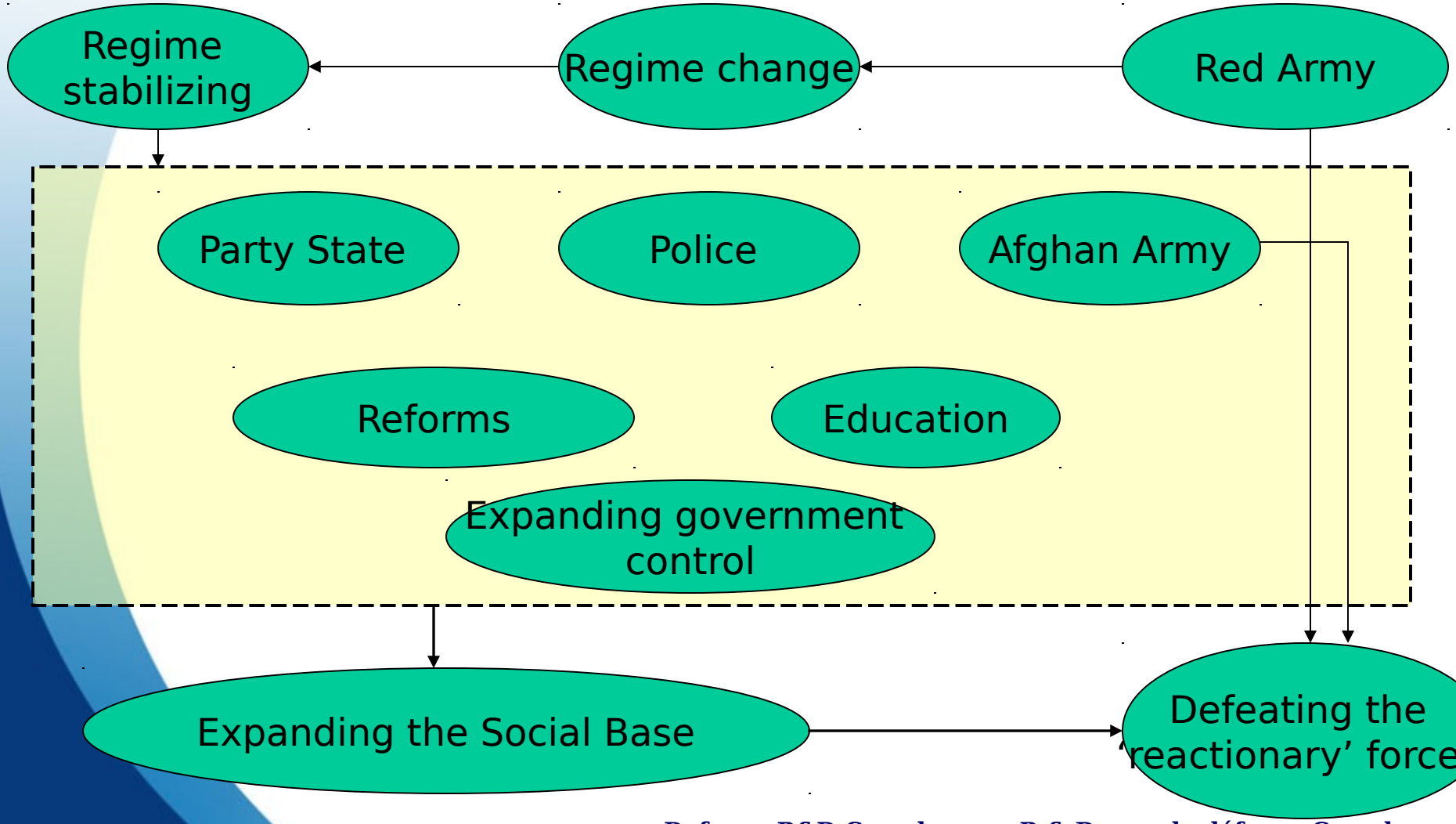
The RPG-18 "Mukha" ("Fly")

Social and State Development

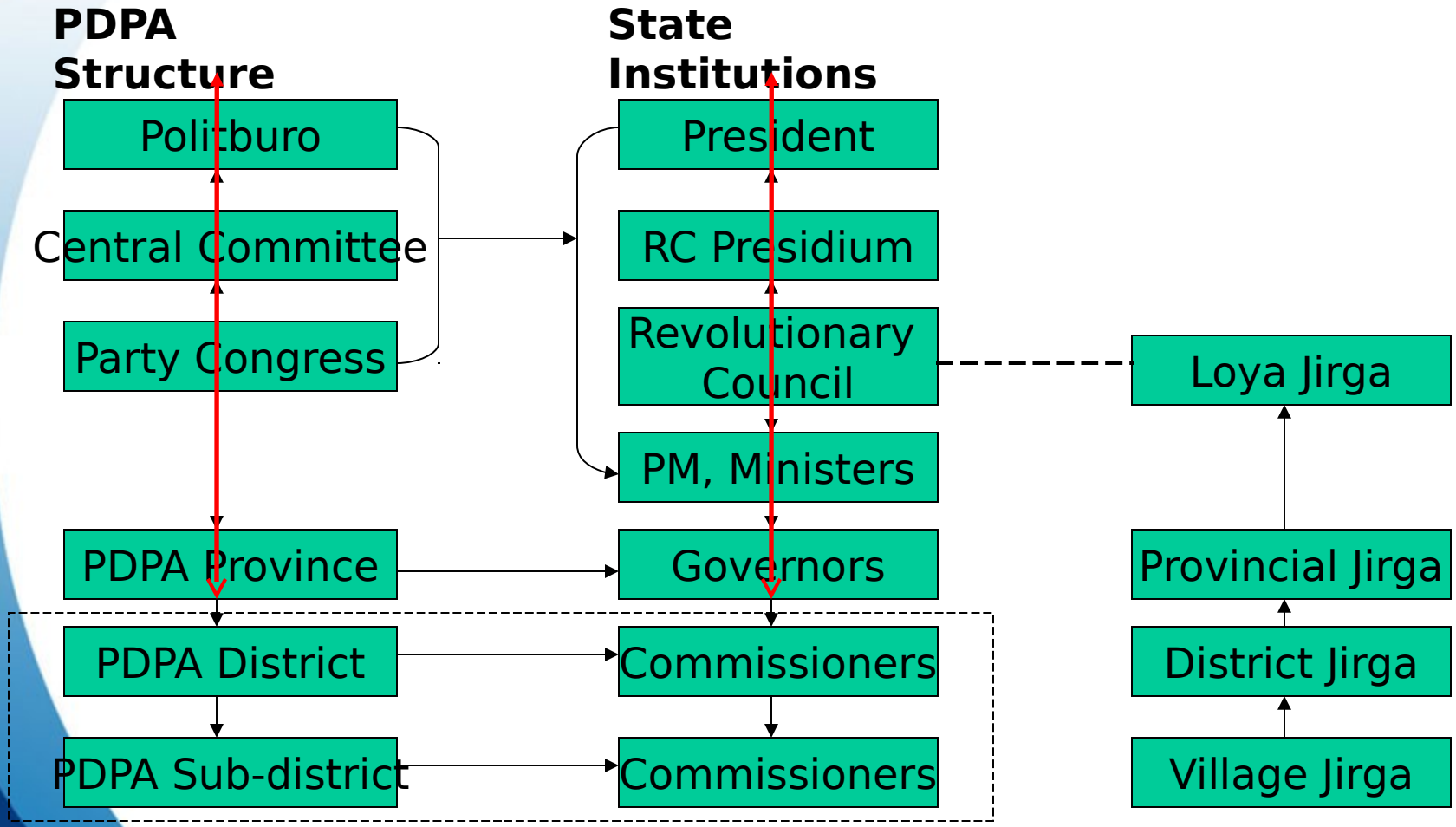
Traditional Functions of State in Islam

- External security (against enemy forces)
- Justice
- Ensuring overall support for Muslim institutions and religion
- Policing, social justice, education, health
  - responsibility of individual communities and Islamic charities (waqf)

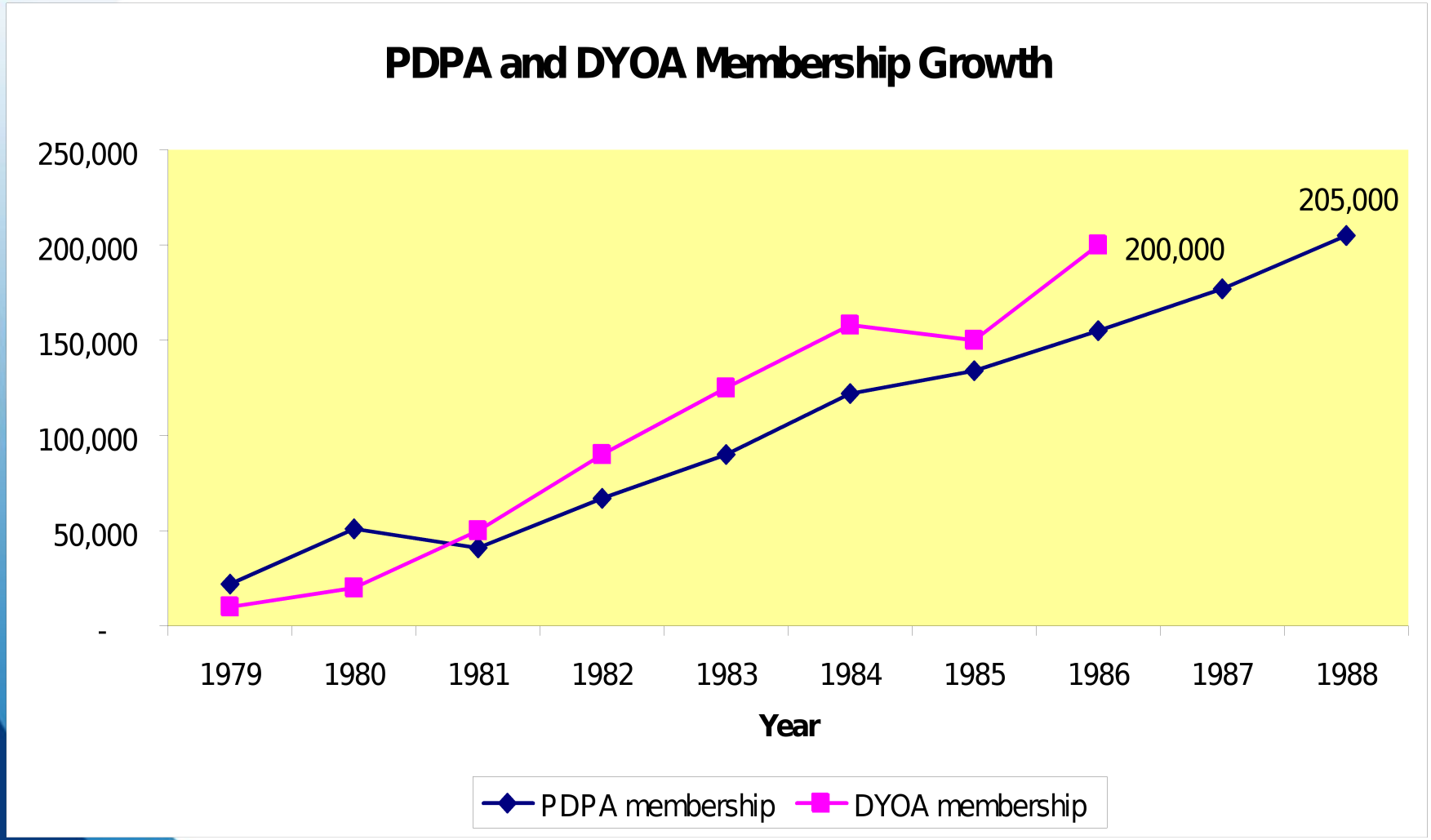
Development: State Building Strategy



The Afghan Party State



Growth of PDPA

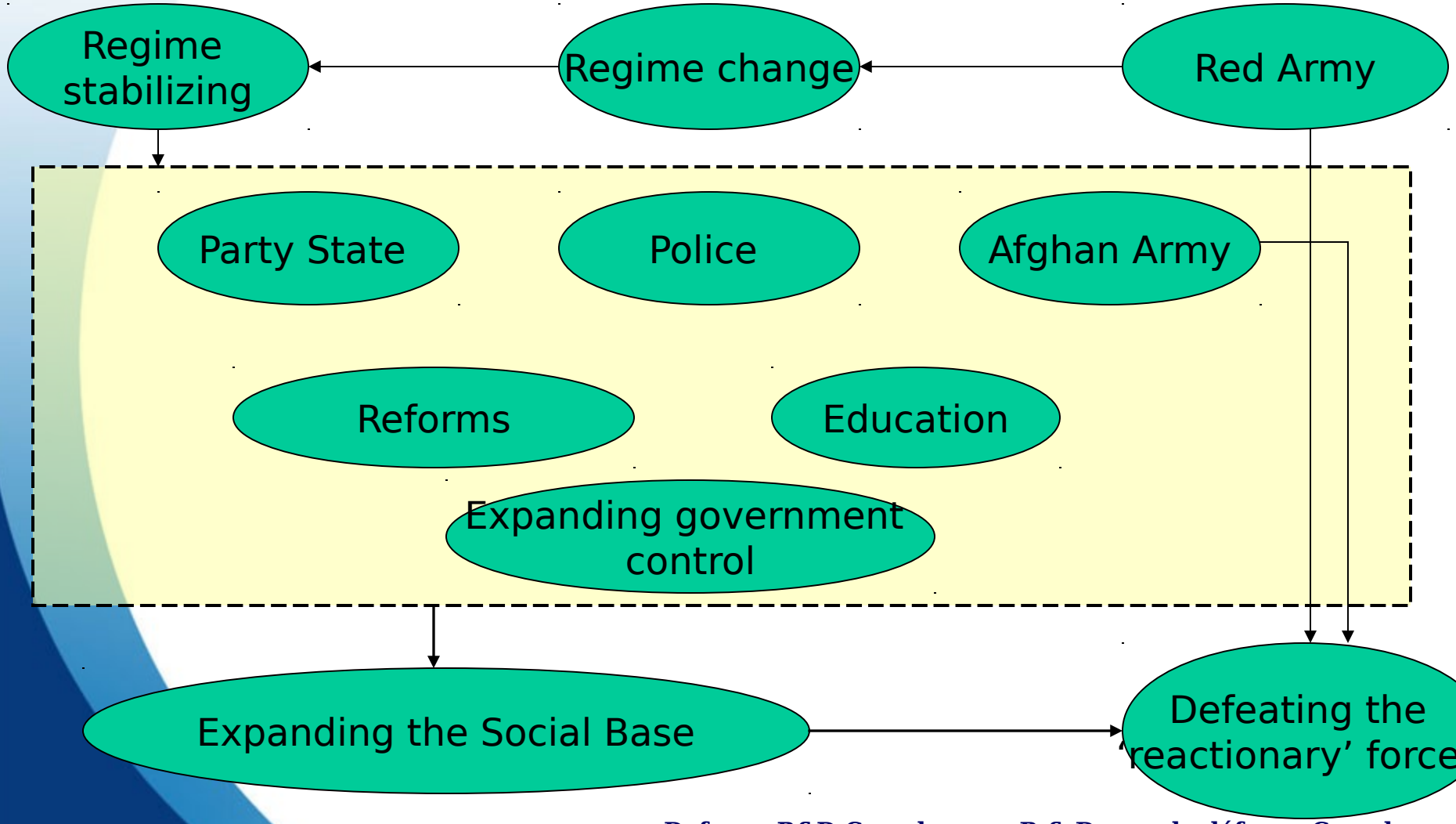


Activists of the Afghan Women's Democratic Organization

Secretary of the local Committee of the PDPA, Kalay-Dana,

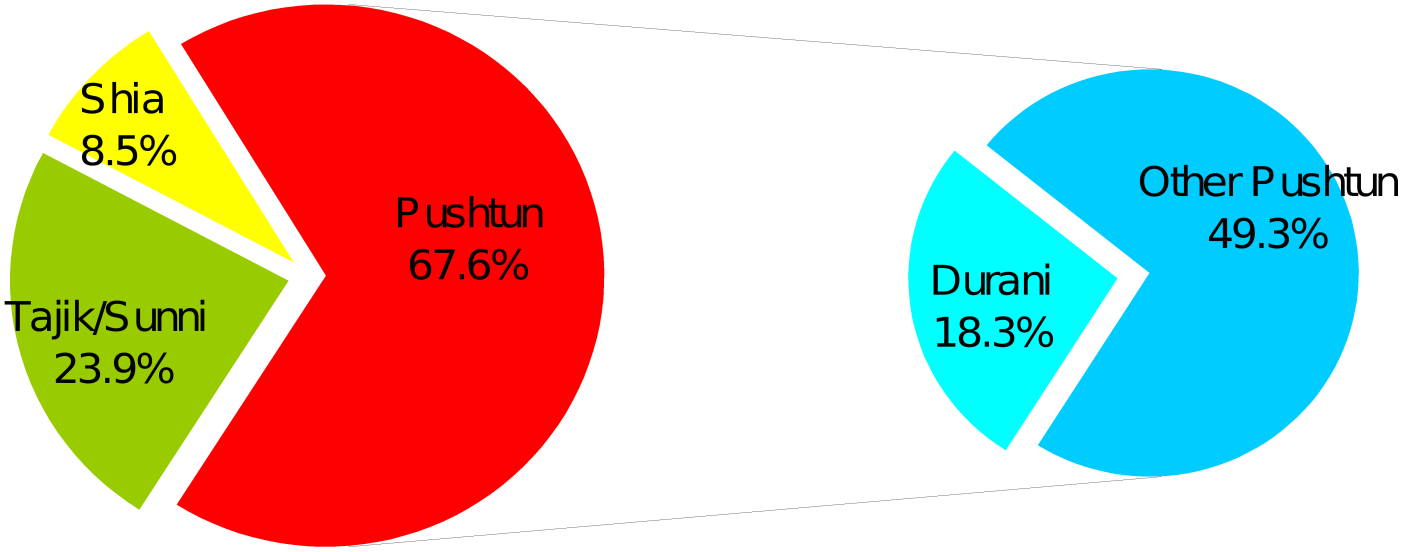
“Delivery” of PDPA activists in Parwan, 1987

Development: State Building Strategy



Ethnic Politics

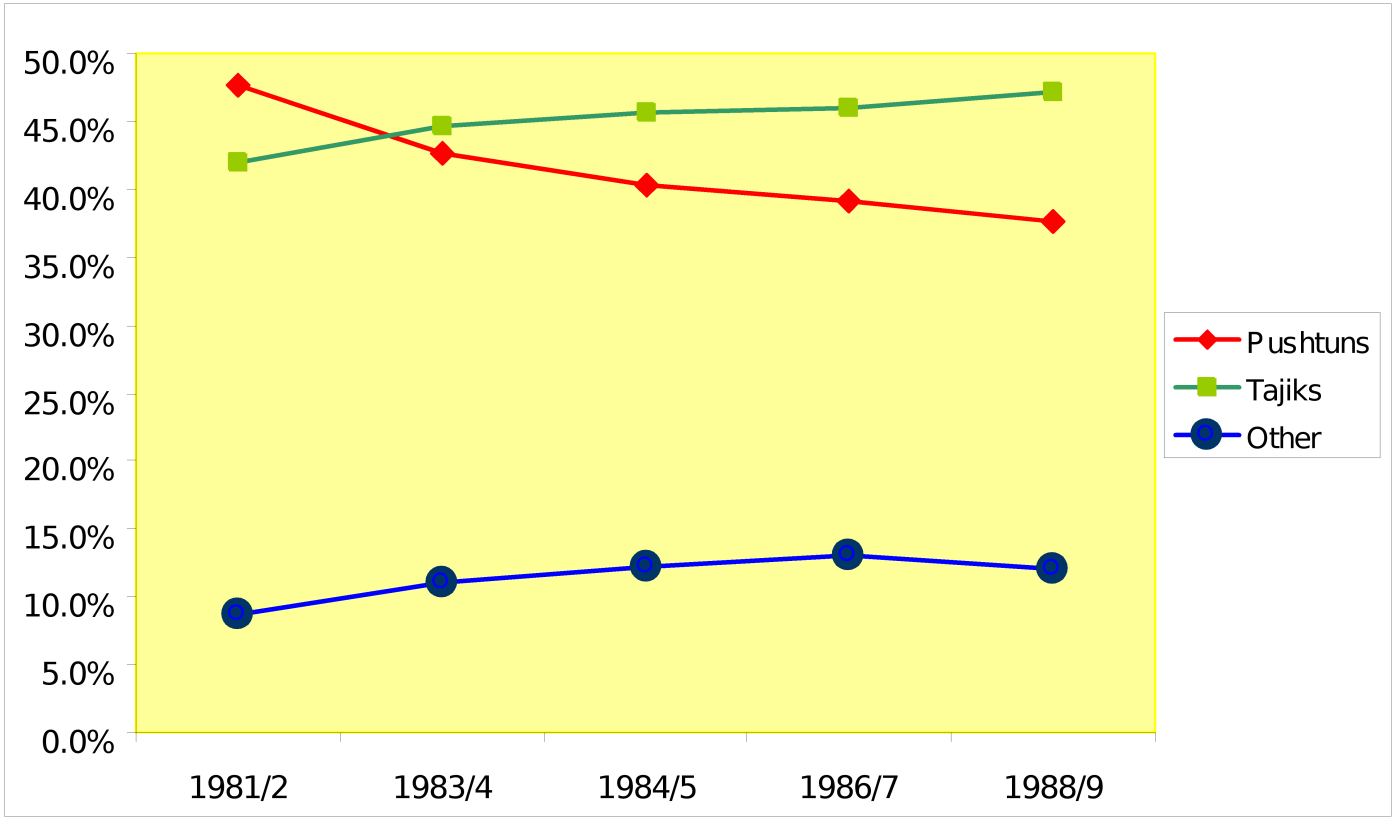
- Ethnic equality guaranteed in 1964
- Khalq and Parcham – ethnic composition



- Language reforms as ethnic politics

Ethnic Policies and Counterinsurgency

- Ethnic Favourism

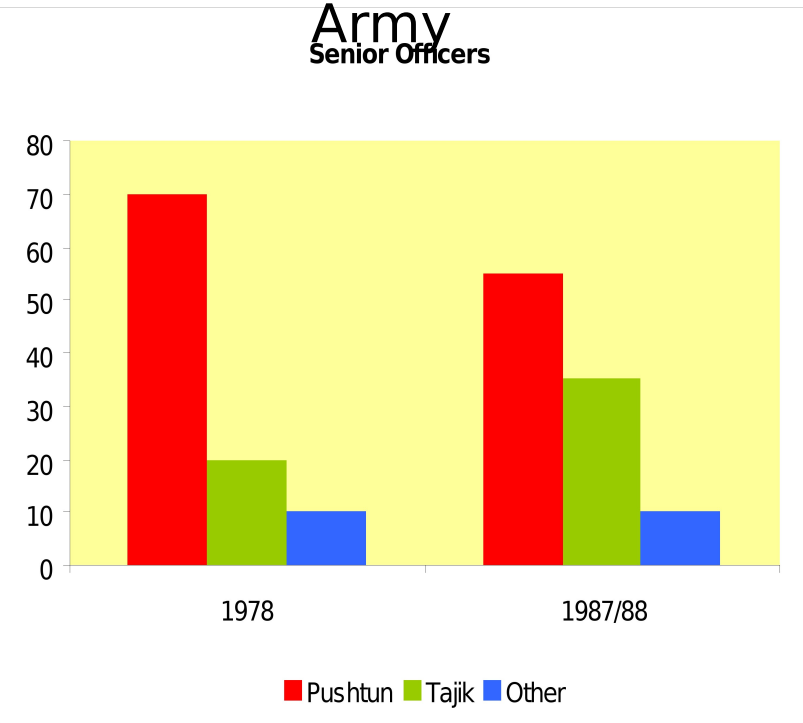


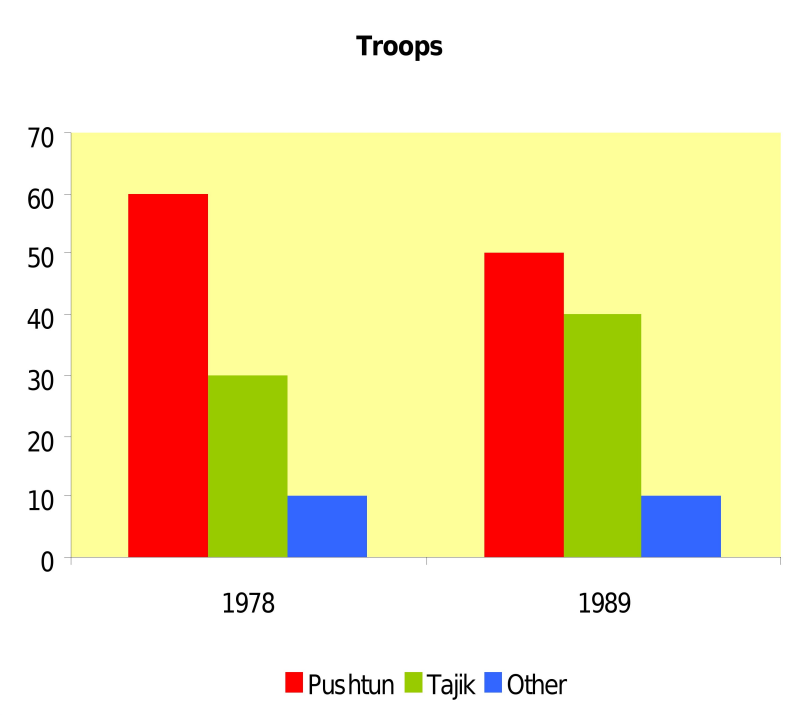
Ethnic Composition of PDPA

From Ethnic Rivalry to Ethnic War

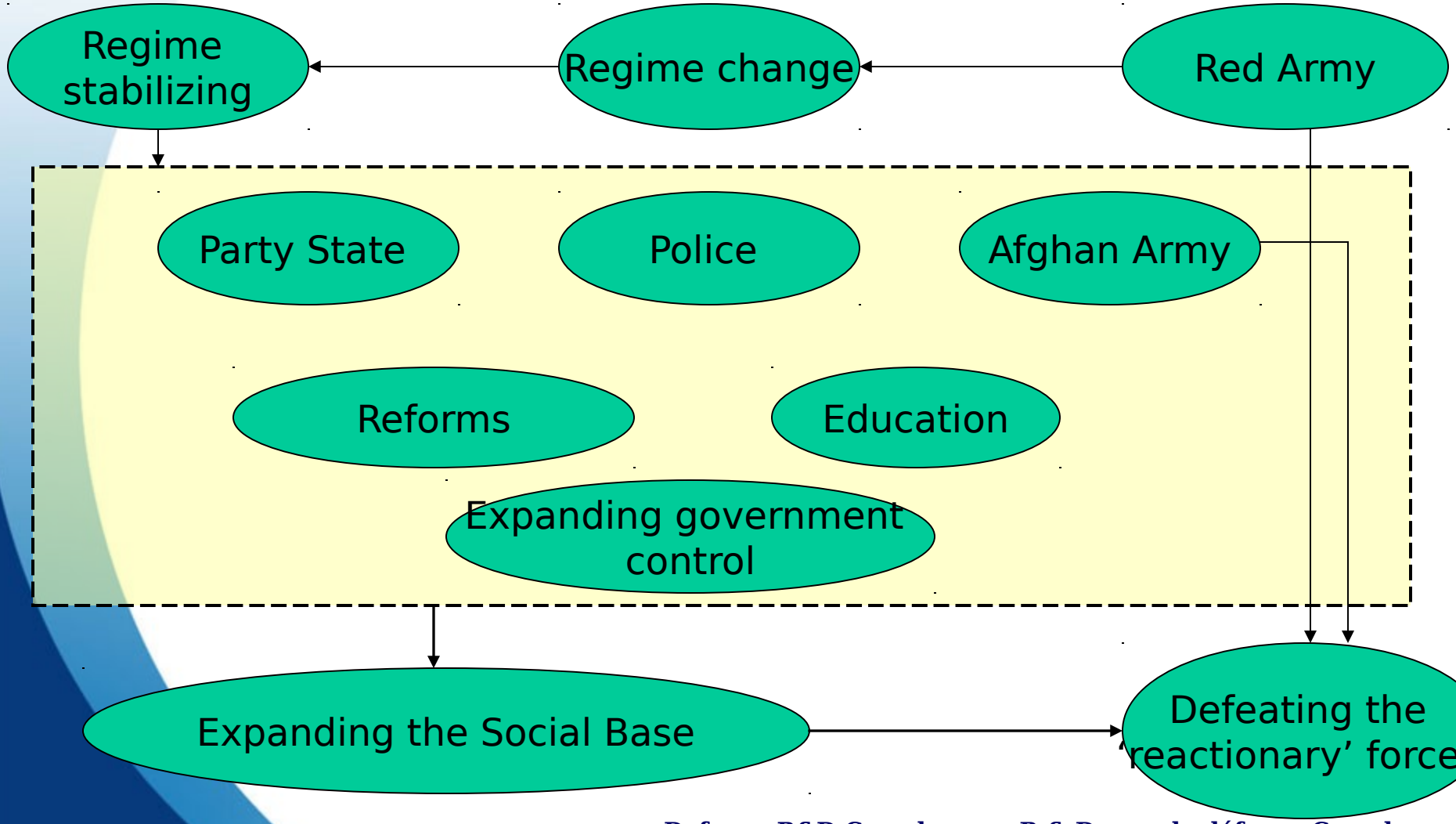
- Ethnic policies changed the balance of power

Ethnic Composition of the DRA Army

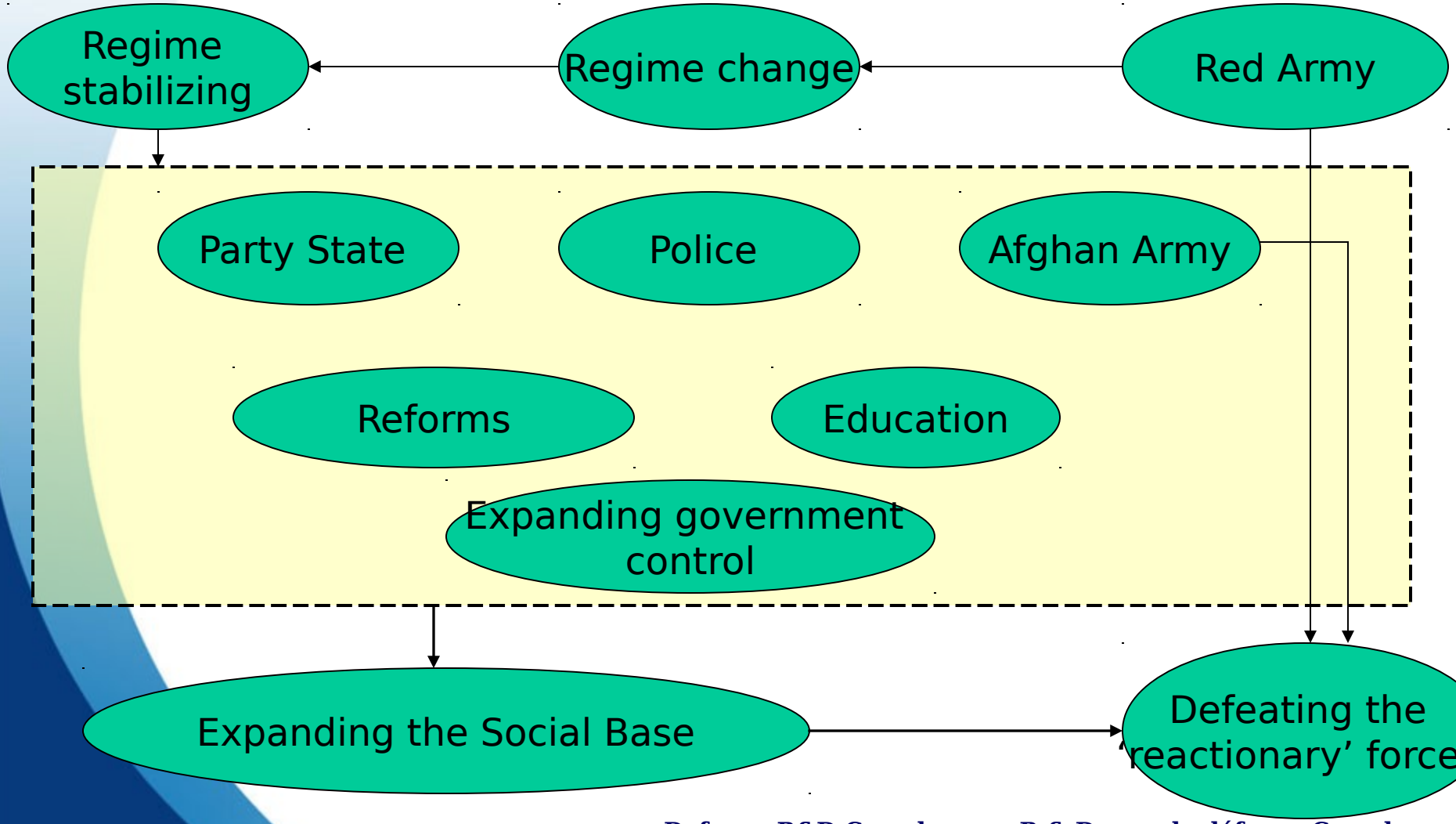




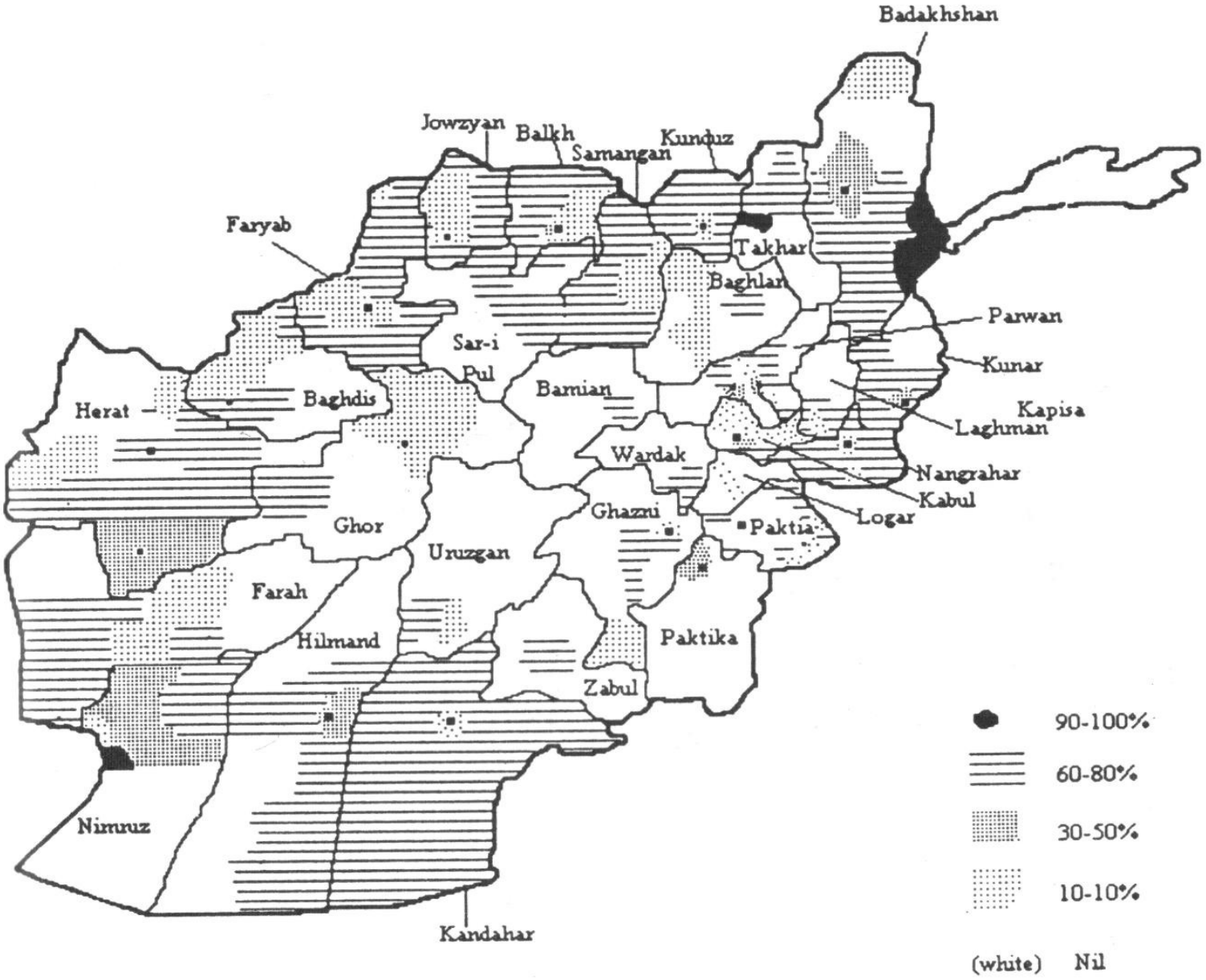
Development: State Building Strategy



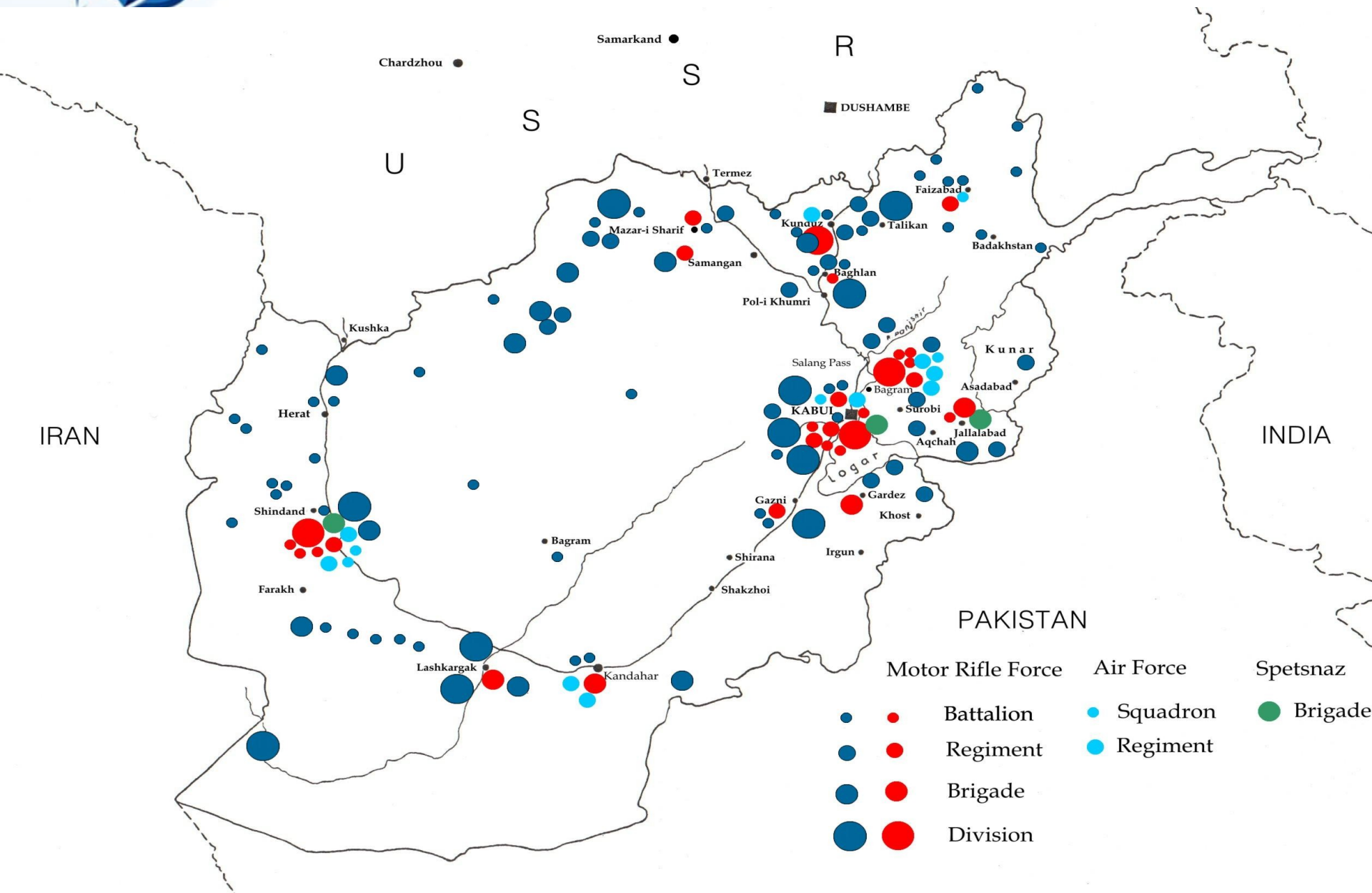
Development: State Building Strategy



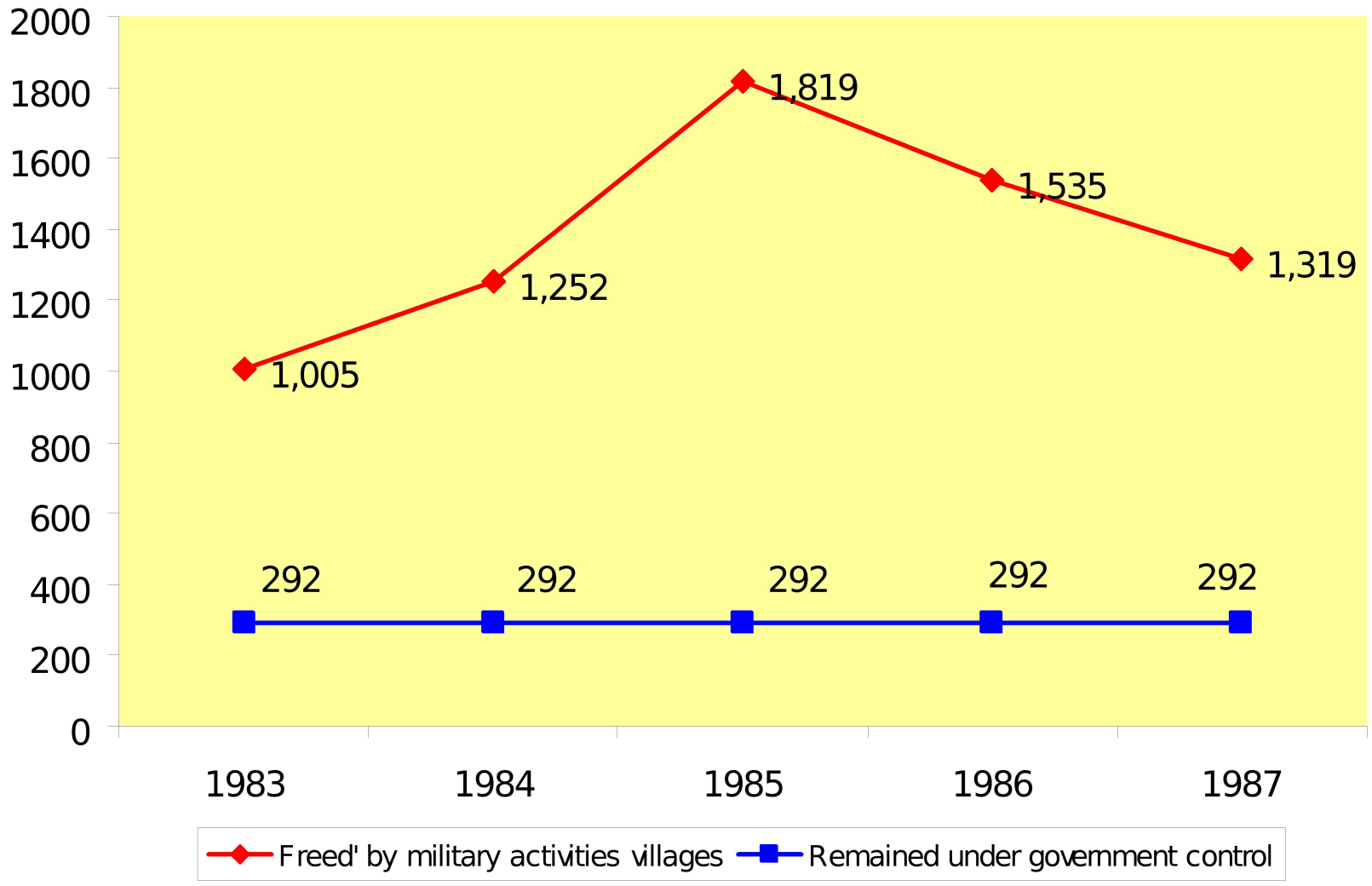
Government Control, 1988



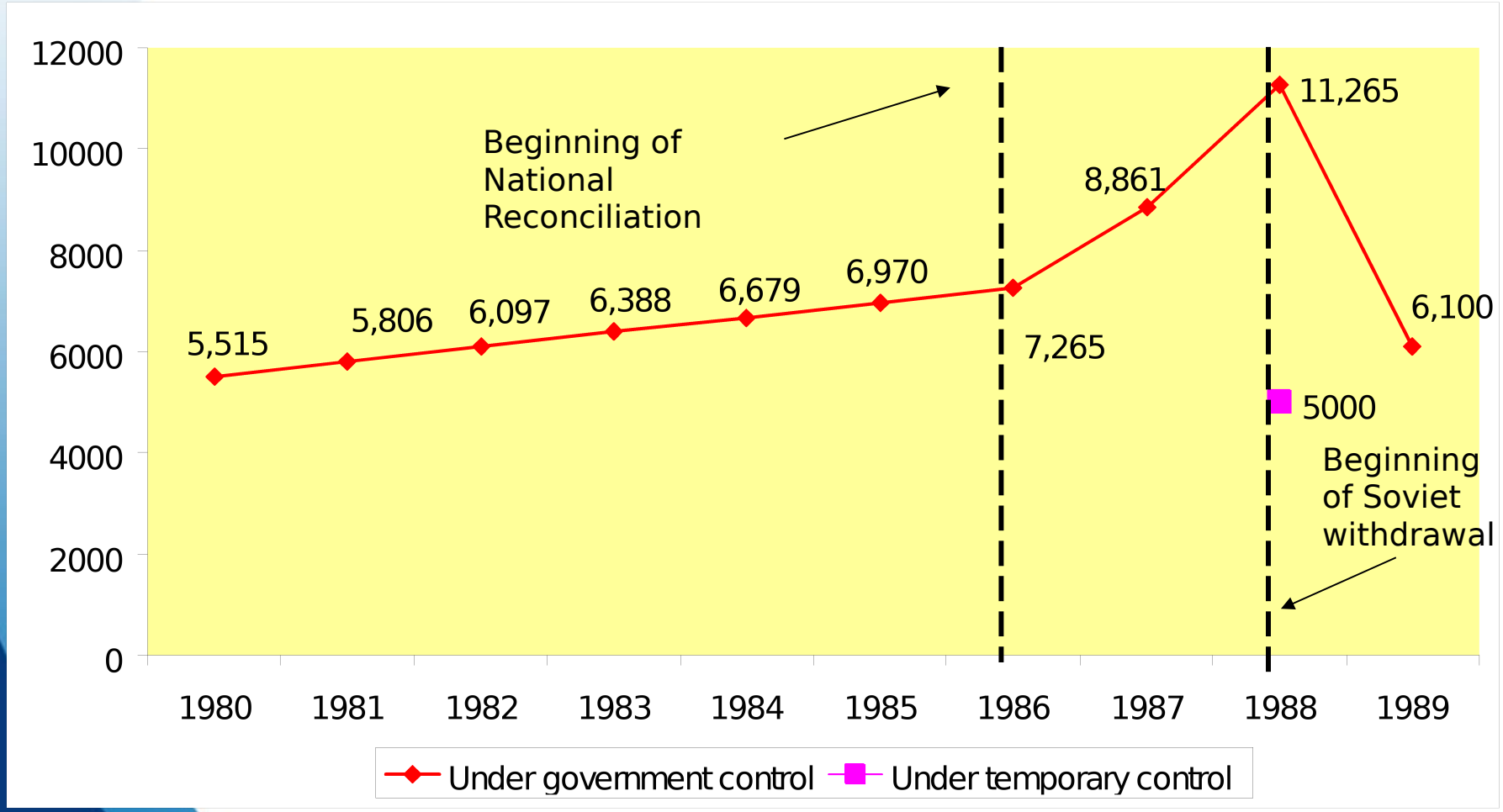
Soviet and DRA Bases



Limits of Military “Pacification”



Number of Villages under Government Control



Diplomacy: Internal

- Unifying PDPA's factions
- Pacification Policy
  - agreements with local leaders and mujahidin
- Loya and local Jirgas (1985, 1988)
- Integrating the ulema (religious scholars) within state run religious system
- Agitprop (CIMIC)
- Promotion of national reconciliation and unity

Agitprop

- Part of force structure
- Composition
  - Military staff
  - Medical personnel
  - Party representatives
  - Entertainers
- Function
  - Spread of information, distribution of fuel, food, medical help, reconnaissance, negotiations
- Initiative gradually “Afghanized”

The Agitprop detachment, 1987. Parwan Province. Durani village

Meeting devoted to the 68-th Anniversary of the October Revolution, 1986

Movie watching. 1986

Fuel distribution, 1986

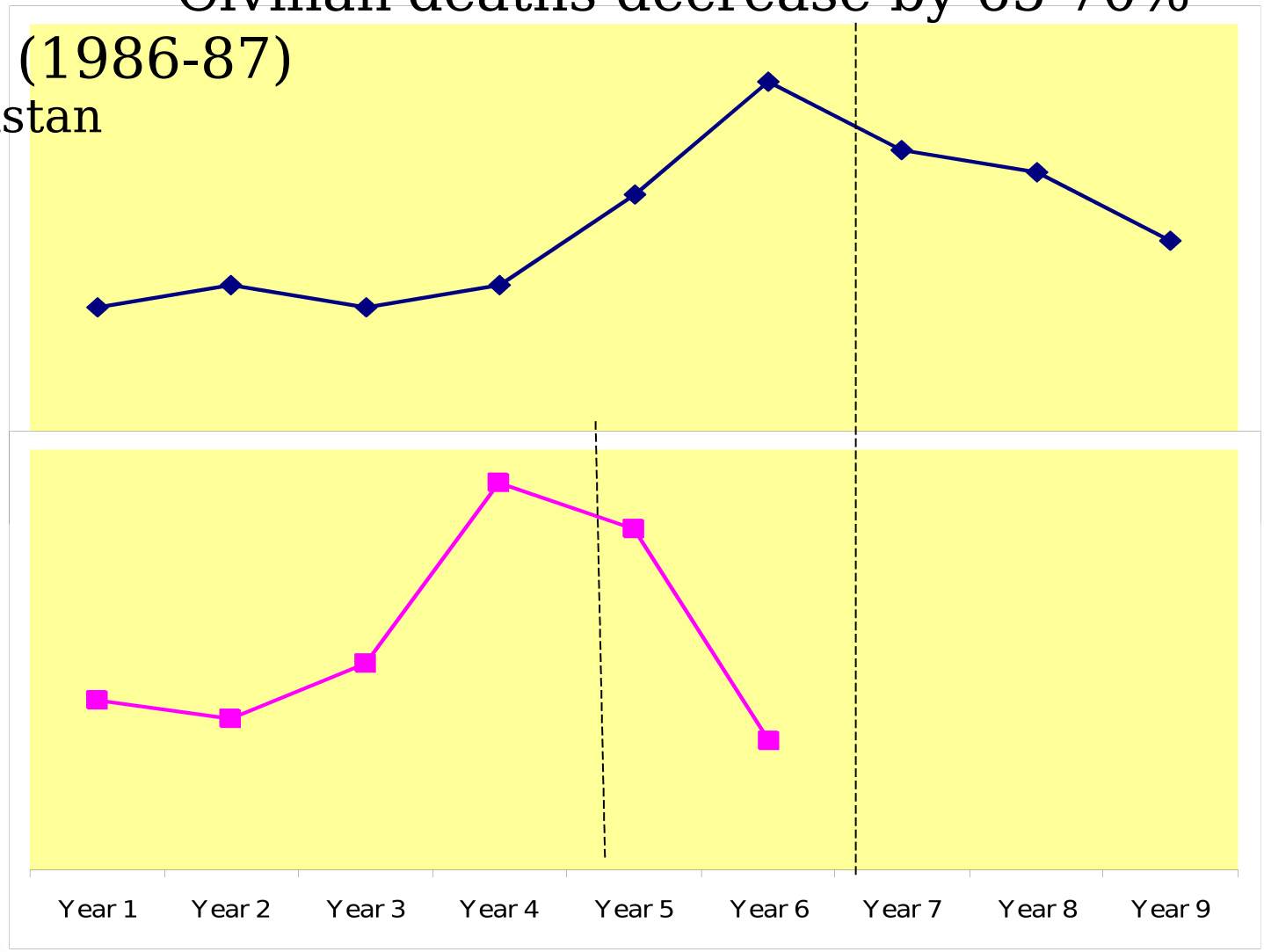
Agitprop of the 108th MRD. 1985

Change of Strategy: National Reconciliation

- Launched in 1986
- More inclusive government
- Reversal of controversial reforms
- Socialism replaced with nationalism
- Promoting Islamic character of the state
- Accommodating and buying off resistance commanders
  - ….but not challenging their authority

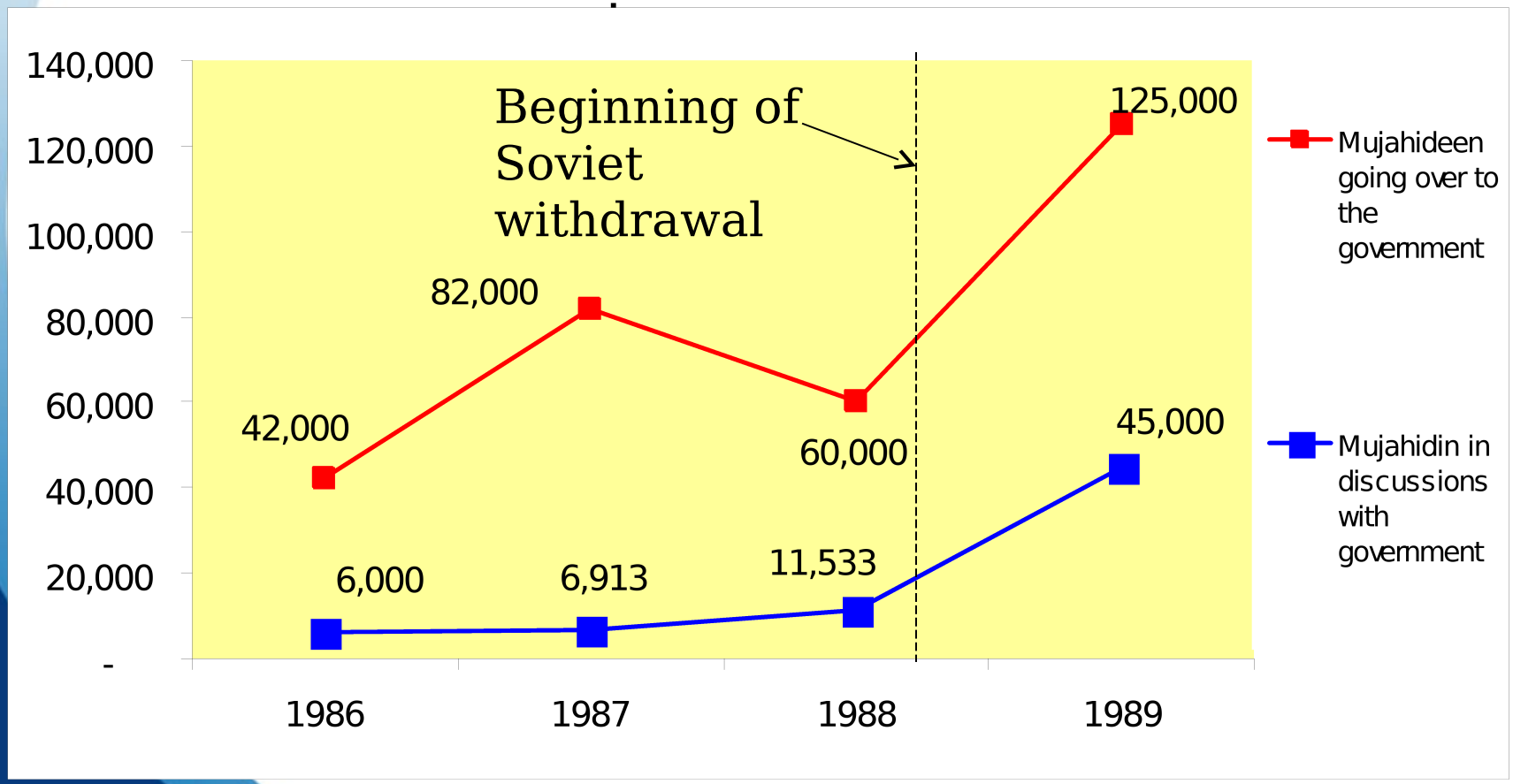
Results - Civilian Casualties

- Civilian deaths decrease by 65-70% (1986-87)



Results - Reconciliation Process, 1986-89

- By 1990, 25% of all non-government armed units had signed “reconciliation” agreements and 40% ceasefire



Development: Economic

- Extensive prior Soviet economic investment
- Increasing the state share of national income
  - 1975 -10%; 1988 - 20% of GDP
  - in manufacturing - 80%
  - in the construction sector – 90%
  - in transportation – 60%
  - Oil and gas exploration – 100%
- Domestic revenue, excluding sales of natural gas
  - Growth of 142 % from 1977 to 1989 (13% per year)

Development: Agriculture

- 60% of GDP, source of income for 80% of population
- Land reforms counterproductive
- Overemphasis on cooperatives, state farms
- Object of contention
  - cash crops vs. foodstuffs
- Target of the counterinsurgency strategy
  - 20% of villages destroyed
- Ultimate result – destruction, import of foodstuffs
- Opium production

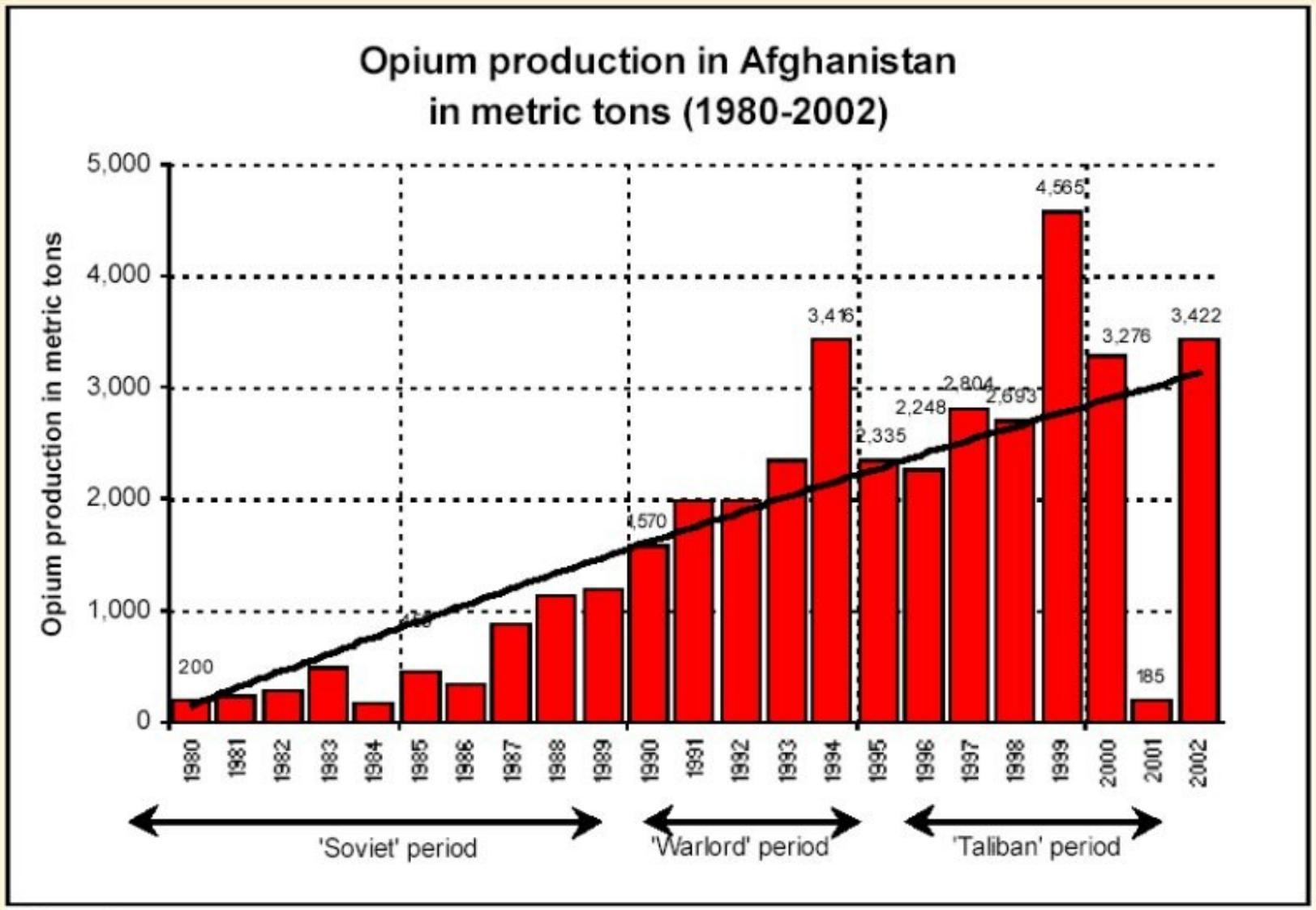
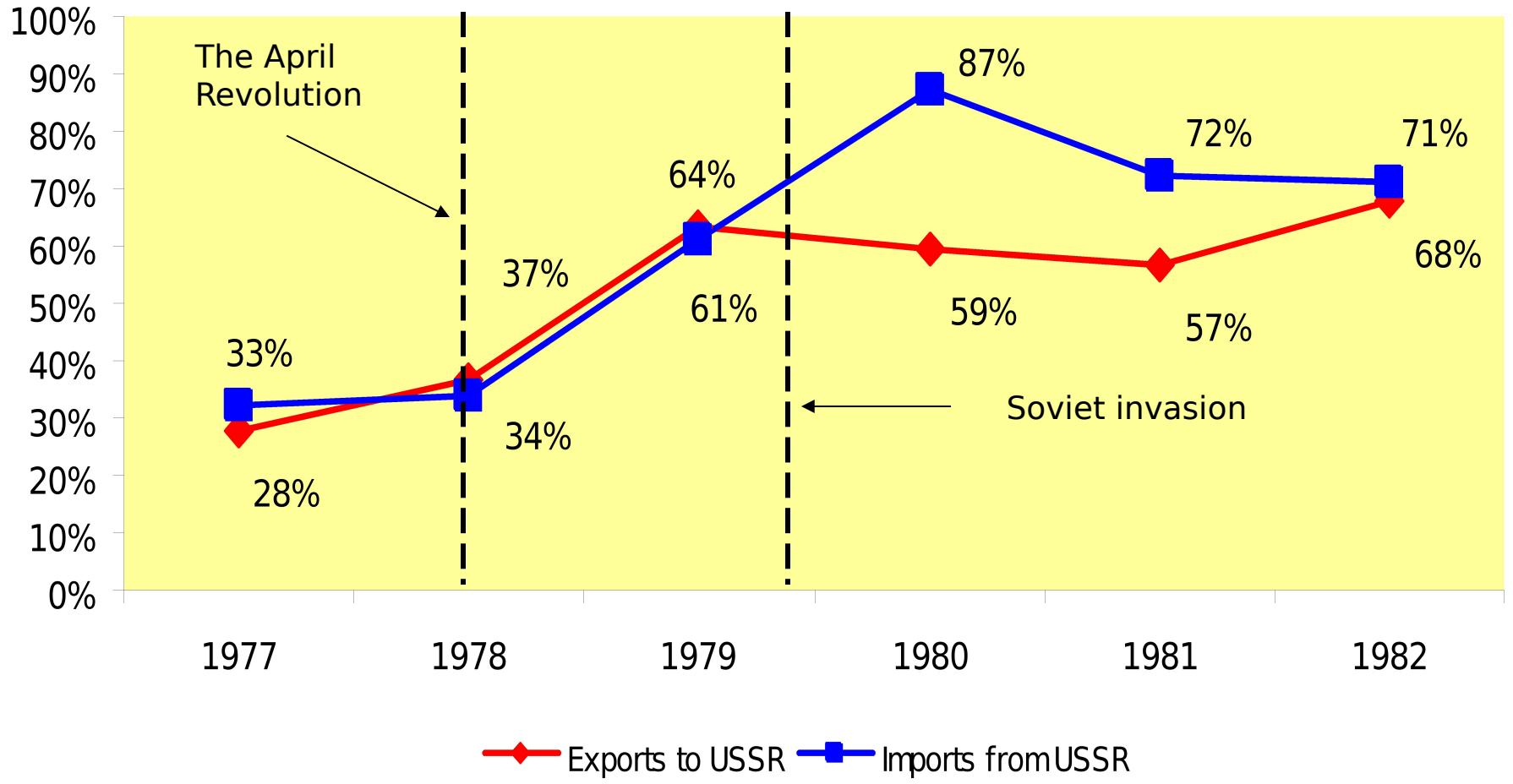


Figure 1
Source: UNDCP, *Global Illicit Drug Trends 2001* and *2002* and UNDCP/ICMP, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2002*.

Development: Trade

- Objective – increase bilateral trade
- Gas exports, mining
  - Exports at below market prices to USSR
  - Soviet technicians
- Manufacturing not encouraged
- Economic integration
- Economy survives on foreign aid
- Corruption

Trade


100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
The April Revolution
Soviet invasion
33%
28%
37%
34%
64%
61%
87%
59%
72%
57%
71%
68%
1977
1978
1979
1980
1981
1982
Exports to USSR
Imports from USSR

Development: Trade

- Objective – increase bilateral trade
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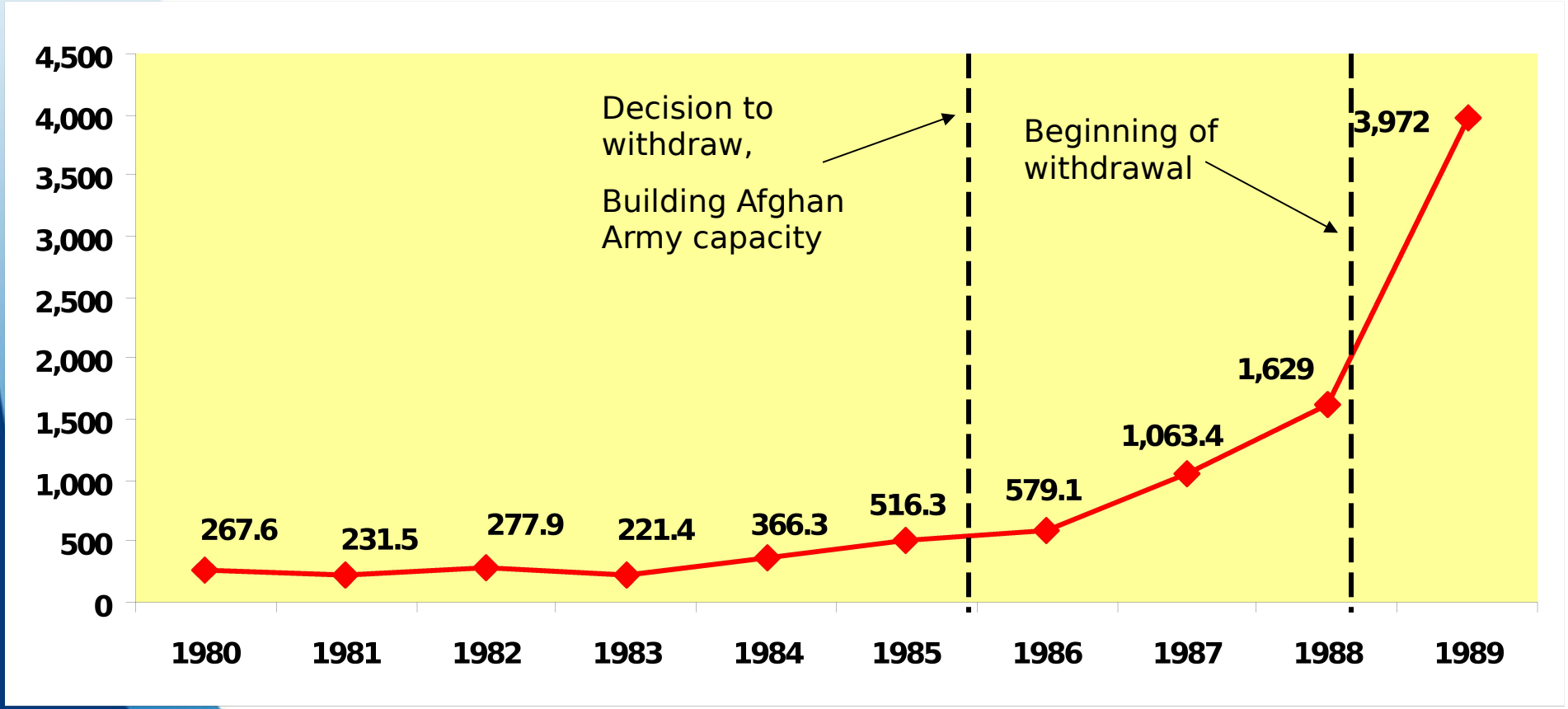
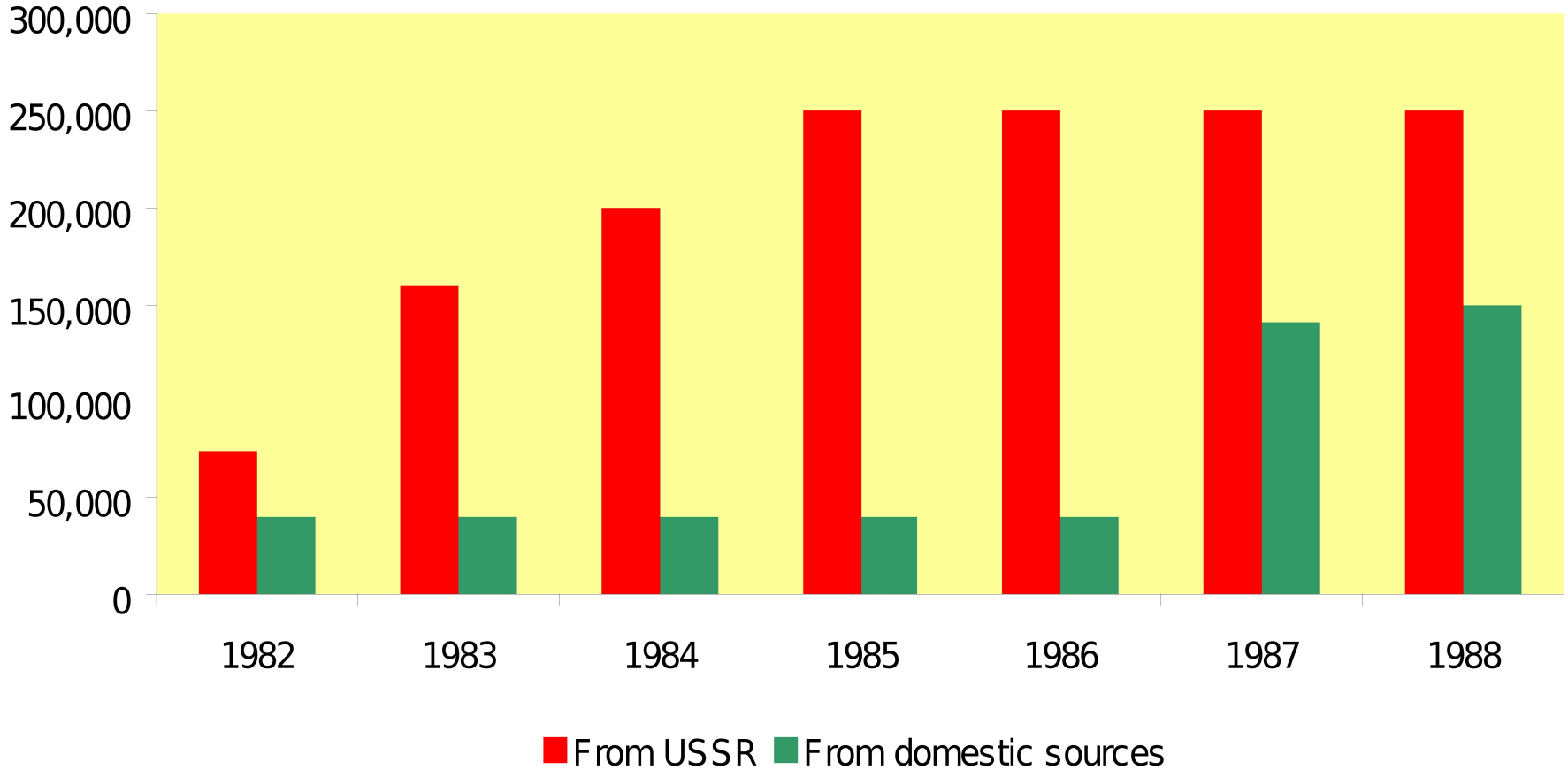
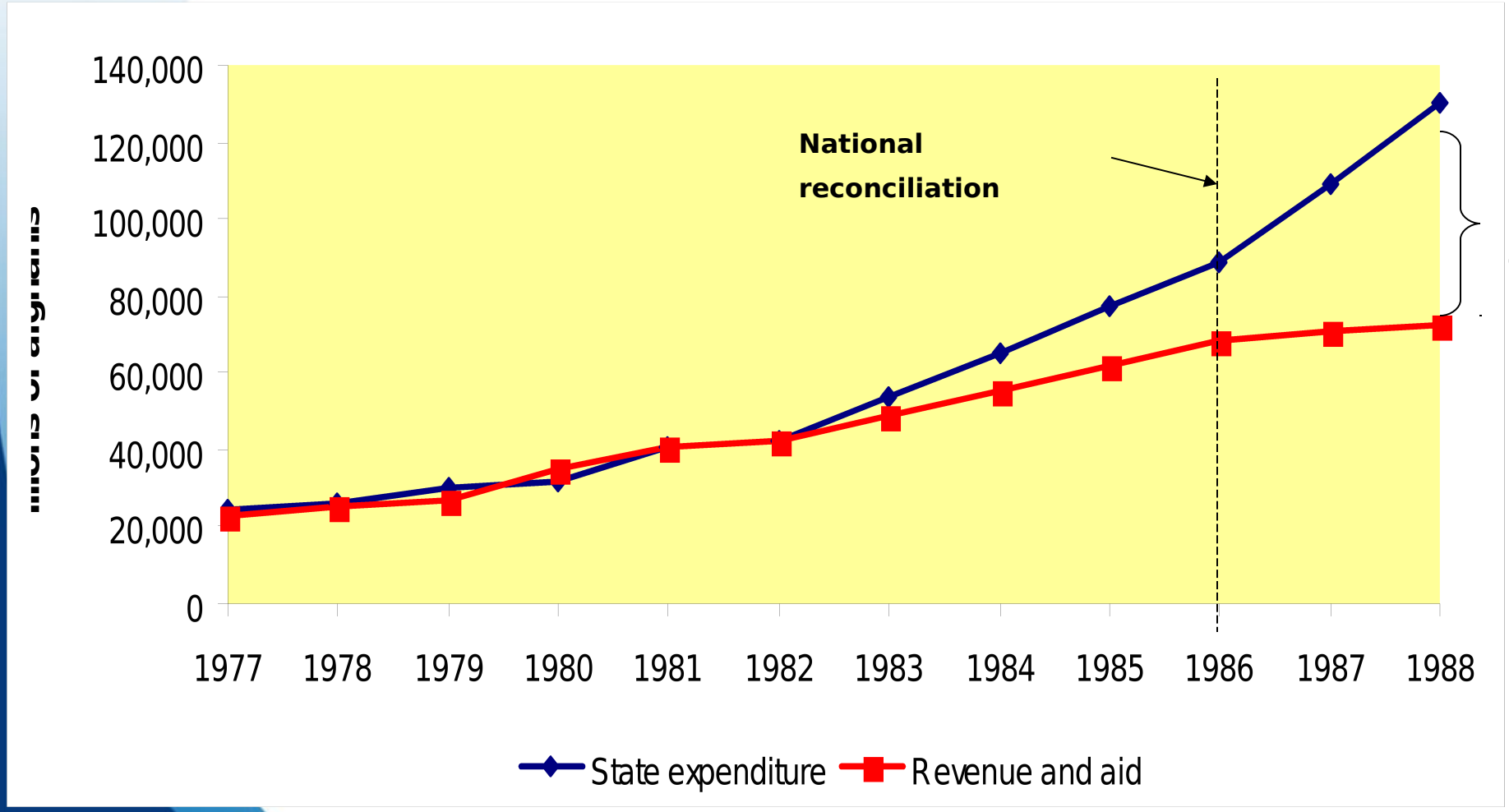
Soviet Military Aid (in Millions of Rubles)



Wheat Supply (in tons)



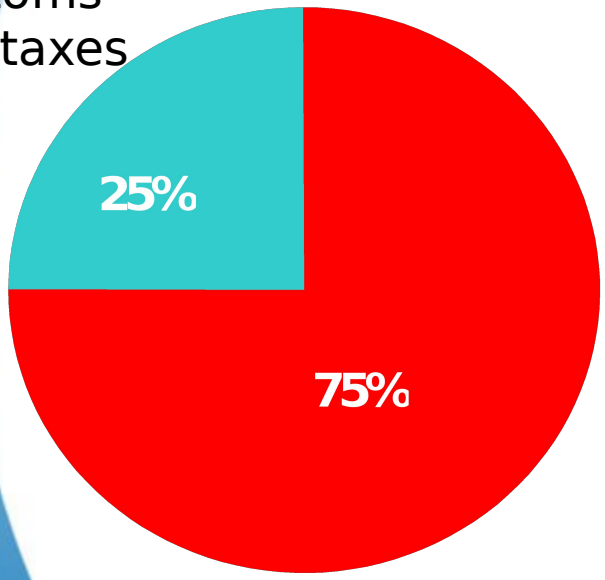
Expenditures and Revenue



Sources of State Revenue

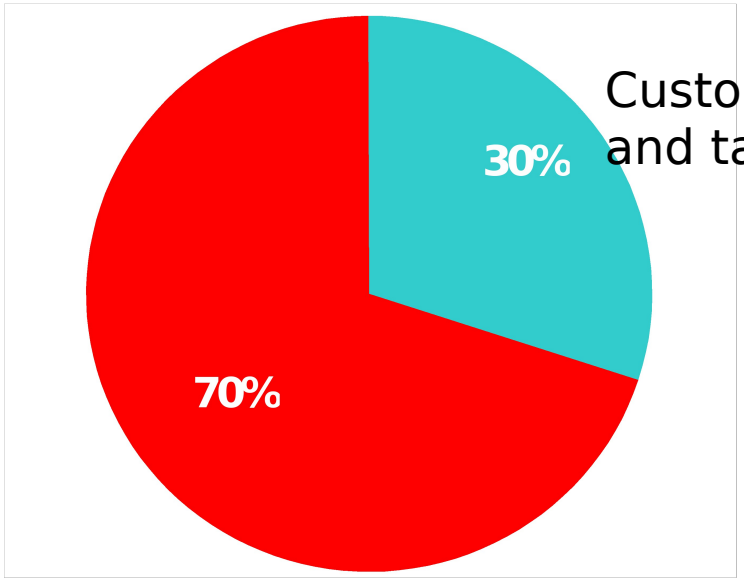
State Income, 1988

Customs and taxes



Natural Gas sales, financial aid

State Income, 1991



Customs and taxes

Soviet Financial Aid

Economic Aid Comparison

- Afghanistan (1980-1989)
  - Soviet aid (converted in 2007 dollars) - $29.7 billion, **$1,980** per capita
- Afghanistan (2002-2009)
  - Disbursed US and international aid - $44.4 billion, **$1,346** per capita
- Iraq (2003-2008)
  - Combined international aid to Iraq - $73.4 billion, **$2,622** per capita

Defeat or Strategic Withdrawal?

- Decision for withdrawal made in 1985
  - Based on shift of Party's global strategy
- DRA army demonstrates increasing capacity
- National Reconciliation progressing
- Effects of Red Army withdrawal are positive
- The Regime survives
  - … but depends on foreign aid
  - … and is weakened by ethnic conflict

Lessons (to be) learned

- Denying sanctuary in Pakistan impossible with a “limited contingent”
- Red Army’s battlefield victories could not be translated into strategic success
- Level of political commitment is more important
- Getting things done in Afghanistan requires local engagement

  …. but runs the risk of perpetuating local power centers that challenge central authority
- Secular values conflict with Afghan traditional values
- Is strong, centralized, democratic Afghanistan fesible?

Lessons (to be) learned – Exit strategy

- Red Army withdrawal removed a principal cause of war for the insurgents
- The policy of “National Reconciliation” was more successful than military operations
- Building Afghan security forces was a viable exit strategy
- Focus on long term economic sustainability is most important
- Keep supporting a friendly regime in Kabul at all costs

Questions?

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